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CHAUCER

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LITERATURE PRIMERS

CHAUCER

INTRODUCTION

THE fame of Chaucer has triumphed over many obstacles. For four out of the five centuries which have elapsed since his death his poems were so imperfectly transcribed and printed that he who hardly ever wrote a bad line, and whose music and mastery of words are almost unrivalled, was apologised for as some rude rhymer. His works were praised for their "learning," printed in black letter as an antiquarian curiosity, paraphrased and translated till he could not himself have recognised them. And yet through all this his fame survived. For in his works, as nowhere else, men found the colour and life of an earlier day. He stands at the close of the Middle Ages and interprets them for us in all their complexity. He shows us their ideals and their practice, their religion and their perplexities: chivalry and satire, cynicism and simplicity meet together in his verse. Yet a greater gift he has given us, a gallery of portraits, more numerous and more vividly sketched than can be found in any other writer of English, save only Shakspere and Scott. When all his art was obscured by the imperfection of the current text, even for his matter only it is little to be wondered at that men have been found to praise him in almost every

decade since his death. But since Tyrwhitt began his labours, now just a century ago, one great section of Chaucer's work, the *Canterbury Tales*, has been accessible in a fairly correct form, and thanks to the labours of the Chaucer Society—alike to its unwearying director and the students, English, American, and German, who have come to his help—the materials for a sound text of the whole of the poet's works, and much useful information about his life and studies, are at last available. To-day Chaucer has more readers and more lovers than at any previous time, and every year increases their number. But old errors about him are still potent. Poems, for the most part quite unworthy of him, for which in the sixteenth century party feeling or editorial caprice sought the cloak of his name, are still attributed to him, and the story of his life is still obscured by mischievous fictions. The controversies thus created are not yet dead, and one unhappy result of them is that this little book cannot be written quite so simply as might be wished. It is not always enough merely to set down what is known about Chaucer, we have also to show how and why it is known, lest the next time a contradictory statement is encountered it may seem to possess equal weight. Only a very dull person will allow these details to usurp an unreal importance, but for the present we cannot wholly do without them.

CHAPTER I

CHAUCER, THE KING'S SERVANT

§ 1. **The Name Chaucer.**—The name Chaucer is believed to have become quite extinct, but in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries it occurs not unfrequently. From the year 1226 downwards we

have a chain of London Chaucers; from 1272 Chaucers are met with in different parts of the eastern counties. The name, which means *shoemaker*, is likely to have cropped up in many places. We cannot, therefore, assume that any particular Chaucer we find mentioned is a kinsman of the poet; we cannot even be absolutely sure that we may not sometimes be confusing two Chaucers, with the same Christian name, who were really distinct. We have no reason to believe that this has actually happened, but the possibility may serve to show with how much difficulty our scanty records of the poet's life have been pieced together.

§ 2. **The Poet's Parentage.**—The first Chaucer with whom we are concerned held at the time of his death a small property in Ipswich of the annual value of twenty shillings or thereabouts, *i.e.* some £15 of our present money. In 1310 he had been appointed one of the collectors in the Port of London of the new customs upon wine granted by the merchants of Aquitaine. This Robert le Chaucer was the poet's grandfather. His wife, Mary (who had previously married one Heyroun), may possibly have been by birth a Stace. Their son's name was John. On her second husband's death Mary married yet again, apparently one of Robert's kinsmen, a Richard le Chaucer, who lived in the ward of Cordwanerstrete, London. On 3rd December 1324, when John Chaucer was between twelve and fourteen years of age, Thomas Stace of Ipswich and others seized his person, with the object of forcibly marrying him to Joan de Westhale, who had an interest in some land in Suffolk, of which the ultimate remainder was settled on John. Richard le Chaucer took up his stepson's cause. Stace and his associates were fined the heavy sum of £250 (some £3700 in modern value), and we learn

from a subsequent plea to Parliament for the mitigation of the penalty that in 1328 John Chaucer was still unmarried and living with his stepfather.

§ 3. **John and Agnes Chaucer.**—Richard Chaucer was a vintner. When he died, in 1349, he left his house and tavern, not to his stepson—then, we may suppose, a thriving citizen—but to the Church of St. Mary Aldermary. John Chaucer also was a vintner. On 12th June 1338 a protection, against being sued in his absence, was granted to him with some forty-five others, who were crossing the sea with the King. Ten years later he acted as deputy to the King's Butler in the port of Southampton. He owned a house in Thames Street, London, which the poet parted with in 1382. We hear of his wife Agnes, "niece of Hamo de Compton," in 1349; but we do not know her maiden name, or the date of the marriage, except that it was after 1328. When John Chaucer died, some time after 16th January 1366, Agnes quickly consoled herself, and appears in May of the following year as the wife of Bartholomew atte Chapel, another vintner. That she found a fresh husband so quickly in 1367 makes it probable that her first marriage took place some considerable time after 1328. But we cannot be sure that she was John Chaucer's only wife, or that Geoffrey Chaucer was his son by her.

§ 4. **Chaucer's Birth.**—Geoffrey Chaucer, then, was the son of John Chaucer, citizen and vintner of London. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary it is probable that he was born in the house in Thames Street, and that his mother's name was Agnes. It is probable also that he was born in 1340 or a year or two earlier. In October 1386, when he was called upon to give evidence in the suit between Richard, Lord Scrope, and Sir Robert Grosvenor, his

age was entered as "forty years or more," a statement the value of which is diminished but not destroyed by the proved carelessness of entries as to one or two other witnesses. We have, however, absolutely no evidence of any weight in favour of any one particular year as that of the poet's birth. In such a case there is an obvious advantage in a round date, and "about" or "probably not later than" 1340 as Chaucer's birth-year fits in very fairly well with everything we know of his subsequent life.

§ 5. **Service in the Household of the Countess of Ulster.**—The first certain information we have about Chaucer is of his service in the household of Elizabeth de Burgh, Countess of Ulster, and wife of Lionel, third son of Edward III. The fragments of her Household Accounts, which contain the name Galfridus Chaucer, were found appropriately enough in the covers of a manuscript containing Lydgate's *Storie of Thebes* and Hoccleve's *Regement of Princes*, so that the works of two brother poets have helped to preserve this record of Chaucer's early life. The accounts show that in April 1357 the Countess was in London, and that an entire suit of clothes, consisting of a paltock, or short cloak, a pair of red and black breeches, and shoes, was then provided for Geoffrey Chaucer, at a cost of seven shillings, *i.e.* about five guineas present value. In May of the same year another article of clothing was purchased for him in London. In the following December, when the Countess was at her seat at Hatfield, in Yorkshire, there is an entry of two shillings and sixpence paid to Geoffrey Chaucer "for necessaries at Christmas." We cannot tell whether the smallness of these sums as compared with other payments was due to Chaucer's youth or to his holding an inferior position in the Countess's household.

These three entries are the only ones which refer directly to Chaucer, but we learn from others that the Countess took part in several great festivities at Court, and at these the poet may have been present. We learn, too, that the winter months of each year were mostly spent at Hatfield, in Yorkshire, and it has been pointed out that here Chaucer must have heard Northern English spoken, perhaps at the very time when he was making his translation of the *Roman de la Rose*. The presence of Northern forms in the extant English version of the poem has helped the majority of critics to maintain that this is not the translation which Chaucer made, but the poet's stay in Yorkshire cannot count for very much on the other side. We may note also that it was towards the end of 1357 that the Countess of Ulster entertained at Hatfield her brother-in-law, John of Gaunt, who afterwards became the poet's best patron.

§ 6. **Chaucer's Campaign in France.**—The Scrope suit in which Chaucer, as we have seen, was called on to give evidence in 1386 related to the right to bear a certain coat of arms. In the record of the trial Chaucer is entered as having himself borne arms for twenty-seven years, *i.e.* since 1359, and his testimony refers to the unlucky campaign in France of that year, during which, he declared, when before the town of "Retters" (probably Réthel, not far from Rheims), he had constantly seen Henry le Scrope armed in a certain manner, until he himself was taken prisoner. His imprisonment did not last long, as on 1st March 1360 the King contributed no less than £16 (£240 present value) to his ransom. Even if the King's contribution constituted the whole ransom, this was a large sum, but Chaucer probably went to the war in the suite of Prince Lionel, or of

the King himself, and this may have increased the price set upon his liberty.

§ 7. **He becomes a Yeoman of the King's Chamber.**—For seven years after his release from captivity we hear nothing of Chaucer save his father's death in 1366 and Agnes Chaucer's remarriage. But we may guess that soon after 1360 he was taken into the King's household, and on 20th June 1367, in consideration of his past and future services, Edward III. granted him a pension, or annual salary, of 20 marks (£13 : 6 : 8, nearly £200 present value) for life, under the title *dilectus valettus noster*. Chaucer was thus one of the yeomen of the King's chamber, a position which in a year or two improved into that of an *armiger, scutifer*, or squire.

§ 8. **His supposed Love Suit.**—At the close of this period, during the greater part of which we are thus ignorant of his doings, Chaucer composed, in 1369, his *Book of the Duchesse*, an allegorical lament for the death of Blanche of Castile, the wife of John of Gaunt. It is usually maintained also that before 1369 (possibly before 1366) he had written the *Compleynt unto Pite*, which, if so, is the earliest of his original poems which has come down to us. The *Compleynt* is a beautiful little poem, of which it is impossible to say whether the motive was merely fanciful or had some real foundation in Chaucer's own life. He was about, he says, to complain to Pity against the cruelty of Love, who tortured him for his faith; but when after many years, during which he had ever sought a time to speak, "al bespreynt with teres," he ran to Pity, he found her dead, buried in his lady's heart, and so his "bill" or petition was unavailing.

The same tone of melancholy pervades the proem

to the *Book of the Duchesse*. Sorrowful imagination is always wholly in the poet's mind, he is a mazed thing, "alway in point to falle adoun," living in melancholy and fear of death, with all his spirits crushed by heaviness and lack of sleep.

> But men might axé me, why so
> I may not slepe, and what me is?
> But natheles, who aské this
> Loseth his asking trewely.
> Myselven can not tellé why
> The soth; but trewely, as I gesse,
> I holde hit be a sikenesse
> That I have suffred this eight yere,
> And yet my bote is never the nere;
> For ther is phisicien but oon
> That may me hele; but that is doon.
> Passe we over, until eft;
> That wil not be, moot nede be left.

The allusions in these two poems certainly point to an unrequited love. The reality of the love is another matter. Many poets before now have feigned passions which had no serious part in their lives, but were recognised on both sides as a pretty amusement, conferring some distinction on the lady, and supplying the poet with a convenient peg on which to hang love verses. In the days of chivalry knights might devote their lances and poets their song to their ladies' service without hope of any other reward than a smile, and it was maintained that marriage with another was no bar to the continuance of this honourable service. We must, therefore, be on our guard against taking Chaucer's mysterious and unhappy love too seriously or too literally. Still the references to it cannot be merely overlooked, and throw some difficulty in the way of fixing the probable date of his marriage.

§ 9. **Chaucer's Marriage.**—On 12th September 1366 a Philippa Chaucer was in the service of the

Queen, and was granted a pension of ten marks yearly for life. We know that this Philippa Chaucer in 1374, and occasionally in subsequent years, received part of her pension by the hands of Geoffrey Chaucer, her husband. That she was called in the grant *una Domicellarum Camerae Reginae*, "one of the damoiselles of the Queen's chamber," does not affect the probability that Philippa was the poet's wife as early as 1366. The term *damoiselle* referred to the office or rank Philippa held, and could be applied to a married woman as well as to a girl. It is even said that it was customary for these damoiselles of the chamber to be married. Except the poetical allusions to another love we have no reason for postponing Chaucer's marriage save the fact that on 30th August 1372, John of Gaunt had given Philippa Chaucer a pension of £10, and that on 13th June 1374 a pension of this same sum was granted by the Duke to Chaucer and his wife for good services rendered by them "to the said Duke, his Consort, and his mother the Queen." It is maintained that this was only a re-grant of Philippa's former pension, and that the cause of the re-grant must be that between 1372 and 1374 "the cousins or namesakes," Geoffrey Chaucer and Philippa Chaucer, had become man and wife. Marriage between cousins in the fourteenth century required a papal dispensation, and the "namesake" theory is too easy a way out of the difficulty to be satisfactory. It seems best to believe that when Philippa Chaucer was granted her pension in September 1366 she was already the poet's wife. If so, we must not take the allusions quoted above too seriously.

§ 10. **Philippa and Thomas Chaucer.**—If Philippa Chaucer was not the poet's "cousin or namesake," who was she? A slender chain of evidence suggests

the answer Philippa Roet, daughter of Sir Payne Roet of Hainault, and sister of Katharine Roet, who after the death of her husband, Sir Hugh Swynford, became the third wife of John of Gaunt, in whose family she had been governess. In the beginning of the fifteenth century a certain Thomas Chaucer was a man of great importance, and it has been frequently conjectured that he was Geoffrey Chaucer's son, a connection which is asserted as a fact by Thomas Gascoigne, Chancellor of the University of Oxford (died 1458). Gascoigne's assertion till lately was thought to be corroborated by a discovery that from 1390-91 onwards a Geoffrey Chaucer, possibly the poet (for the appointment was in the gift of descendants of his first patroness, the Countess of Ulster), held the Forestership of North Petherton, Somerset, and that in 1416-17 a Thomas Chaucer was granted the same post. But we have no proof of the identity of these two Chaucers, so that, as has been said, the corroboration thus offered is only slight. We know, however, that the important Thomas Chaucer was in great favour with the Lancastrian kings (young Prince Hal even calling him his "cousin"), and we know, too, that towards the close of his life he exchanged the Chaucer arms for those of Roet. Thus his descent from Sir Payne Roet appears not unlikely, and it is certainly possible that this descent was through Philippa Chaucer. The connection which would thus be established between the poet and John of Gaunt would explain the many marks of favour which the latter bestowed upon Chaucer and his wife, but the question has very little bearing upon Chaucer's poetry, and may well be regarded as an open one. If Chaucer's wife was Philippa Roet the poet was most likely the father of the Elizabeth Chaucer for whose novitiate at the Abbey of Barking

John of Gaunt paid a considerable sum in 1381. But the only child of his of whom we have certain knowledge is the little Lewis for whom he compiled a treatise on the Astrolabe, calculated for the year 1392, when the boy was ten years old.

§ 11. **Chaucer's Life at Court.**—We left Chaucer as a valet or yeoman of the King's chamber, shortly on the point of being promoted to the rank of an esquire.[1] As a valet his duties would be to serve in the chamber, make beds, hold and carry torches, and do "divers other things," which the King or the chamberlain might command him. He would eat in the chamber before the King, and have an allowance of food and beer, and every year a robe in cloth or a mark in money, and three shillings and fourpence twice a year for shoes. If sent out of the Court on the King's business fourpence a day was allowed for expenses. By Christmas 1368 Chaucer had risen to be an "Esquire of less degree," with a wage of seven-halfpenny a day, and two robes yearly, or forty shillings in their stead. We do not know exactly what were the duties of the esquires (there were thirty-seven of them in 1368); but an old manuscript tells us that "these Esquires of household of old be accustomed, winter and summer, in afternoons and in evenings, to draw to Lords chambers within Court, there to keep honest company after their cunning, in talking of chronicles of Kings, and of other policies, or in piping or harping, 'songinges' or other 'acts marcealls,' to help to occupy the Court, and accompany strangers, till the time require of departing." If such tasks formed an important part of the esquire's work, no wonder that Chaucer soon rose in favour.

[1] These details are gleaned from the Household Books of Edward II. and Edward IV. (*Ch. Soc.*), between which there are fewer variations than might be expected.

§ 12. **His Diplomatic Missions — First Visit to Italy.**—In 1369, the year after his promotion to be an esquire, Chaucer took part in the war in France. We know this from the record of a loan of £10 advanced to him by one Henry de Wakefield, but the record tells us nothing else. In 1370 Chaucer was abroad on the King's service, and obtained letters of protection from creditors till Michaelmas, when he returned and received his pension on 8th October. He received his pension with his own hands in 1371 and 1372, but we know nothing of his doings until 12th November of the latter year, when he was joined in a commission with two citizens of Genoa to treat with the Duke, citizens, and merchants of that place for the choice of some port in England where Genoese merchants might settle and trade. For his expenses he was allowed an advance of a hundred marks, and a further sum of thirty-eight marks was paid after his return, which took place before 22nd November 1373, when he received his pension in person.

As we shall see in another chapter, Chaucer was very greatly influenced by the writings of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, and borrowed a little from the first and second, and a great deal from the third. It is impossible to date this intimate acquaintance with Italian literature from any earlier time than the Genoese mission of 1372-73. The King's esquire may very probably have learned a little Italian, and been chosen for the mission for this very reason. But none of his contemporaries show any trace of direct Italian influence, and it is unlikely that previously to his mission Chaucer would have had much access to Italian manuscripts, which, on the other hand, could be easily purchased either on this or on his subsequent stay in Italy. This first visit was not confined to Genoa, but extended also, so the warrant

of repayment tells us, to Florence. If we can believe that Chaucer also visited Padua (some distance off), we may take as applying literally to the poet himself the statement of his imaginary Clerk of Oxenford that the tale of the patience of Grisilde was "lerned at Padowe of a worthy clerk . . . Fraunceys Petrark, the laureat poete." Petrarch was at Arqua, near Padua, from January to September 1373, and was then engaged on the Latin version of the story of Grisilde, which Chaucer undoubtedly used for his translation. At the least there is no impossibility in this meeting between the two great poets, and it is pleasant to imagine it (see also § 46).

§ 13. **Comptrollership of the Customs.**—From the mission to Genoa dates a great advance in Chaucer's prosperity. On St. George's Day 1374 the King, then at Windsor, granted him a pitcher of wine daily. He received money in lieu of this in 1377, and the next year it was commuted for a pension of twenty marks. In May he leased from the Corporation of London the dwelling-house over the gate of Aldgate. In June he was appointed Comptroller of the Customs and Subsidy of Wools, Skins, and tanned Hides in the Port of London, with the obligation to write the rolls of his office with his own hand, and to be continually present. In the same month he was granted by John of Gaunt the pension of £10 for the service rendered by him and his wife Philippa, which we have already noticed in § 9. In 1375 two wardships were granted him, one of which, that of Edward Staplegate of Kent, subsequently brought him in £104. In 1376 the King made him a grant of £71 : 4 : 6, the price of some wool forfeited at the Customs for non-payment of duty; and just before Christmas he receives ten marks as his wages as one of the retinue of Sir John Burley in some secret service. In February

1377 he went to Flanders with Sir Thomas Percy on a secret mission, and later in the same year was engaged in France, probably with the King's ambassadors, who were then negotiating a peace. Payments for his expenses are duly recorded.

§ 14. **Second Mission to Italy.**—On 21st June 1377 Edward III. died, but the advisers of the eleven-year-old Richard II. were favourable to Chaucer, and the change of kings only increased his prosperity. Early in the next year he probably took part in another embassy to France, to negotiate Richard's marriage with a daughter of the French king, and in the following May we find him preparing to go with Sir Edward Berkeley on a mission to Lombardy, there to treat on military matters with Bernabo Visconti, Lord of Milan (whose imprisonment and death form one of the tragedies of his Monk's Tale), and with the famous free-lance, Sir John Hawkwood. He obtained the usual letters of protection, and appointed two friends, Richard Forrester and the poet Gower, his agents during his absence. The arrears of his pension (£20), with an advance of two marks on the current quarter, were paid him, and on 28th May he received one hundred marks for his wages and expenses during his mission. Of the mission itself we know nothing, but we find Chaucer at home again on 3rd February 1379, when he drew his arrears of pension for the time he had been absent. As far as we know, with this journey to Lombardy Chaucer's career as a diplomatist came to an end, and for the next year or two he had no relief from the drudgery of his clerk's work at the Customs. All his employments were, no doubt, helpful to him as a poet in widening his knowledge of men and places, but the two missions, December 1372 to November 1373 and May 1378 to February 1379, during

which he must have spent more than a twelvemonth in Italy, had probably an influence on his poetry greater than any other event in his life.

§ 15. **Work in London and Loss of Office.**—For the next five years or so we must picture Chaucer as attending to his duties as Comptroller of the Customs and Subsidies (§ 13), receiving his own and his wife's pensions at irregular intervals, and probably dunning the Treasury for £22 due to him for his last French mission until in March 1381 it was finally paid. On three successive New Year's Days (1380-82) his wife was presented with a silver gilt cup and cover by the Duke of Lancaster, and in May 1382 Chaucer himself was appointed Comptroller also of the Petty Customs of the Port of London, with leave to exercise his office by deputy. In February 1385 the same privilege was permitted him in regard to his old Comptrollership, after he had been allowed a month's leave of absence at the end of the previous year. In the following April he probably took advantage of his new leisure to go on the merry pilgrimage to Canterbury, his glorified version of which has ever been accounted his chief title to fame. From 1st October to 1st November 1386 he sat in the Parliament at Westminster as one of the Knights of the Shire for Kent, and on 15th October gave evidence, as we have seen, in the Scrope case (§ 6). But his hitherto unbroken good fortune was now interrupted. His patron, John of Gaunt, was superseded in the government by the Duke of Gloucester, and a commission was appointed for inquiring into the state of the subsidies and customs, with the result that we hear of the nomination in December of successors to Chaucer in both his Comptrollerships. He had exercised them for some time through a deputy, but it is more probable that he was superseded as a follower of the Duke of Lan-

caster than for any irregularities connected with his own work. Shortly before this he must have given up his house in Aldgate, for in October of this year it was let to another tenant, and we have no knowledge where the poet lived during the next thirteen years.

§ 16. **Chaucer's Married Life.** — On 1st May 1380 a certain Cecilia de Chaumpaigne executed an absolute release to Chaucer from all liability *de meo raptu*. No compensation or other consideration is mentioned as having been offered by the poet, and in the view of the present writer the most probable interpretation of this release points to Chaucer having been accessory in some such attempt on Cecilia Chaumpaigne as the Staces had practised against his own father. Some time in the second half of 1387 it is probable that he lost his wife, for there is no record of any payment of her pension after midsummer in that year. We know really nothing about the marriage, but it has generally been assumed that it was an unhappy one. Chaucer's own experience certainly did not prevent him from following the mediæval satirists in their gibes at the married state and scant respect for wives, and in the envoy to the *Clerkes Tale* and the *Envoy to Bukton* he assumes an attitude of intense bitterness, whether in jest or earnest can hardly be decided. It is noteworthy, however, that in the poems which we know to have been written during his wife's lifetime this bitterness against marriage does not appear. The worst that can be alleged against him up to the beginning of the *Canterbury Tales* (1386?) is that in the *Hous of Fame* he alludes to a voice—supposed to be his wife's—bidding him *Awake* of a morning in ungoodly tones, a jest which heavy sleepers who share the poet's objection to being roused will not be inclined to take seriously. As far as the evidence of his poems goes

—and we have really nothing else to guide us—Chaucer was a less religious and a less clean-spoken man when his wife's influence was removed than he had been during her life, and if we have no reason for believing that their union was ideally happy, we have certainly none for adding Chaucer to the long list of poets whose marriages have wrecked their lives.

§ 17. **Financial Troubles—New Employments.**—As we have seen, Philippa Chaucer's pension died with her, and we may surmise that the loss of this and of his employment reduced the poet to some straits, for we find him in May 1388 assigning both his pensions (*i.e.* the original pension of twenty marks and the twenty marks allowed him instead of his pitcher of wine) to a certain John Scalby, who plainly must have given him a lump sum in exchange for them. Better times, however, were approaching. In May 1389 the young King took the reins of government in his own hands. The Duke of Gloucester retired to the country, and John of Gaunt was once more in favour. On the following 12th July Chaucer reaped the benefit of these changes, being appointed Clerk of the King's Works at the Palace of Westminster, the Tower of London, and various royal manors, at a salary of two shillings a day, and with power to employ a deputy. A year later he was ordered to procure workmen and materials for the repair of St. George's Chapel, Windsor, and was paid the costs of putting up scaffolds in Smithfield for the King and Queen to see the jousts in May. In the intervening March he had been named, with five others, as a commissioner for the repairs of the roadways on the banks of the river between Greenwich and Woolwich. It was about this time also, between June 1390 and June 1391, that he may have been appointed Forester to North Petherton Park, in Somersetshire (see § 10);

but by the summer of the year 1391 he had lost both his lucrative clerkships, though he received various payments in connection with them as late as 1393.

It was during this brief spell of renewed prosperity that Chaucer endured the unpleasant experience of being robbed twice in one day (6th September 1390) by members of the same gang of highwaymen—the first time at Westminster of £10, the second at Hatcham, by the "foul oak," of £9 : 3 : 8. The money was not his own, but the King's, and was forgiven him by writ on 6th January 1391. One of the gang turned "approver" or informer against the rest; but being challenged to a wager by battle and defeated, was himself hanged, a fate which seems eventually to have befallen most of his comrades.

§ 18. **Last Years and Death.**—Having parted with his pensions and lost his clerkships, Chaucer had no means of subsistence, *i.e.* none known to us, save his possible Forestership at North Petherton and the Commissionership of the Roadways between Greenwich and Woolwich. From one of these latter places, "forgete in solitary wilderness," he wrote to his friend Scogan, a witty fellow "at the stremè's hede Of grace, of alle honour and of worthynesse," *i.e.* the Court at Windsor, a humorous poem on Scogan's having bid farewell to love. The last verse, in which he contrasts their fortunes rather sadly, contains the petition, "myndè thy friend there it may fructify." It is possible, therefore, that it may have been through Scogan's good offices that in 1394 Richard II. came to Chaucer's relief with a grant of a new pension of £20 a-year for life. It is probable, however, that the poet still found it difficult to make both ends meet, for during the next few years we find him frequently obtaining loans from the Exchequer in advance of his pension, and on two

occasions these loans are as small as 6s. 8d. (£5 modern value). In May 1398 he obtained from the King letters of protection against enemies suing him —not a certain, but a probable sign of poverty,—for we know that just at this time he was being sued for a debt of a little over £14. In October of the same year Richard granted him a tun of wine yearly, in answer to a petition which seems to have begged it, somewhat pitifully, "for the sake of God and as a work of charity." A few months later the King himself was deposed.

Richard II. had turned no deaf ear to Chaucer's appeals, but on the new king his claims as an old adherent of John of Gaunt were still stronger. A poem entitled a *Complaynt to his Purs*, addressed to Henry IV., elicited a fresh pension of forty marks (October 1399) in addition to the £20 granted by Richard II. Curiously enough the poet lost the written grants for both these pensions, and had to apply for fresh copies of them, which were duly granted. Thus assisted, Chaucer, on 24th December, took a lease of a tenement in the garden of St. Mary's Chapel, Westminster, for as many of fifty-three years as he should chance to live. He drew an instalment of one pension on 21st February 1400, and £5 on account of another on 5th June, by the hands of a friend. On 25th October, just ten months after he had taken his long lease, he died, and was buried in St. Benet's Chapel, in Westminster Abbey, where his grave has since been surrounded by those of many later poets. In 1556 a pious admirer erected a tombstone of grey marble to his memory (it is from this we learn the date of his death), probably to replace an earlier one which had worn away. A stained glass window, with portraits of himself and his contemporaries, and views of the pilgrims setting

forth and arriving at Canterbury, was placed over against his grave by Dean Stanley in 1868.

§ 19. **Summary.**—As we shall see, Chaucer's life has been made the subject of a whole series of baseless statements, some of them merely wild, others misleading, while at least one is highly injurious to the poet's reputation. In the foregoing account an effort has been made to distinguish what we certainly know from what we can only doubtfully infer, and to show the evidence by which the more uncertain points must be decided. While so many mis-statements are still current, and our information is still so imperfect, this is the only way in which a life of Chaucer can safely be written; but it is a dull way at best, and also obliges us to notice a great many very small matters which cannot by any possibility increase our power of appreciating the poet's works. What we have to remember, put shortly, is this: that Chaucer was the son of middle-class parents who had some slight influence in the household of Edward III.; that, probably at an early age, the poet was introduced to the life of a great court; that he saw at least a little military service; that he was employed on diplomatic missions, sometimes in conjunction with men of high rank, and that as these missions were frequent, it is a fair inference that he showed unusual capacity for them; that some of these missions took him to France, where he had also endured an imprisonment of a few months, and that at least two others caused him to spend a very considerable time—over a year—in Italy. Before these missions were over he had obtained a footing in what we may call the civil service, in which he continued, transacting business of very various kinds, for a great many years, his fortunes apparently rising and falling with those of the house of Lancaster.

During a great part of this time his income must have been considerable; but it is probable that he spent it freely, and was acquainted with poverty as well as wealth. We know also that he married, and have no good reason to believe that the marriage was unhappy, though we find traces in his early poems of another and unsuccessful love.

§ 20. **Variety of Chaucer's Life.**—Chaucer was thus, at various times of his life, a courtier, soldier, diplomatist, and man of business, and it was mainly by hard work done in these various capacities that he earned his living, though in his old age the fact that he was a great poet may have won for him rather more consideration than kings always show to their worn-out servants. Probably no other poet of equal rank has ever led so active and varied a life, and it is because we find Chaucer in his poems so shrewd a man of the world, so astonishingly observant, and so good a judge of character, that we take an interest in finding out how he obtained his experience. When we come to examine his writings we shall find that the double life he was obliged to lead had one bad effect: it caused him to leave many of his poems unfinished. If we may take a passage in his *House of Fame* (Bk. ii. ll. 139-152) quite literally, he must often have been in danger of over-work, though the absolutely healthy tone of his poems forbids us to think that he ever fell a victim to it. There it is said to him:—

> And noght oonly fro ferre contree,
> That ther no tydynge cometh to thee,
> Not of thy verray neyghebors,
> That dwellen almoste at thy dors,
> Thou herist neyther that nor this,
> For when thy labour doon al ys,
> And hast y-made thy rekenynges,
> Insted of reste and newé thynges,

Thou goost home to thy house anoon,
And, al-so dombe as any stoon,
Thou sittest at another booke,
Tyl fully dasewyd ys thy looke,
And lyvest thus as an heremyte,
Although thyn abstynence ys lyte.

In the *Legende of Good Women* (ll. 29-39) there is another passage which tells in the main the same tale, but tells us, too, what it was that kept the poet so healthy-minded all his days. Here he is speaking himself:—

And as for me, though that I konne but lyte,
On bokes for to rede I me delyte,
And to hem give I feyth and ful credence,
And in myn herte have hem in reverence
So hertely, that ther is game noon
That fro my bokes maketh me to goon,
But yt be seldom on the holy day,
Save, certeynly, when that the monethe of May
Is comen, and that I here the foules synge,
And that the flowres gynnen for to sprynge,—
Farewel my boke, and my devocioun!

§ 21. **His Person.**—Thus we see that Chaucer had the habits of a student as well as those of a man of business, and if we ask how he looked when he walked about the world, the way he is addressed in his *Canterbury Tales* by the merry Host shows us how he himself imagined that his appearance would strike others.

Approche neer and look up merrily.
Now war you, sires, and lat this man have place.
He in the waast is shape as wel as I:
This were a popet in an arm to embrace
For any womman, smal and fair of face.
He semeth elvyssh by his contenance,
For unto no wight doth he daliance.

The well-known portrait of Chaucer, which forms the frontispiece to this book, is taken from the "lyknesse" in body-colour which Thomas Hoccleve caused to be

painted on one of the leaves of his own *Regement of Princes*, now the Harleian MS. 4866 in the British Museum, and usually publicly exhibited in the show-case devoted to English manuscripts. Dr. Furnivall's description and comment on it bring out its qualities so well that they are here quoted. "The face," he says, "is wise and tender, full of a sweet and kindly sadness at first sight, but with much bonhomie in it on a further look, and with deep-set, far-looking grey eyes. Not the face of a very old man, a totterer, but of one with work in him yet, looking kindly, though seriously, out on the world before him. Unluckily the parted grey moustache and the vermilion above and below the lips render it difficult to catch the expression of the mouth; but the lips seem parted, as if to speak. Two tufts of white beard are on the chin; and a fringe of white hair shows from under the black hood. One feels one would like to go to such a man when one was in trouble, and hear his wise and gentle speech." The background of the portrait is green against a brown border, the poet's dress black, relieved by the red strings by which hang his pen-case and beads. Other portraits exist, but they are less carefully drawn. They serve, however, by their general resemblance to show us that the one we owe to the piety of Hoccleve is no mere fancy sketch.

§ 22. **Chaucer Legends.**—To complete this sketch of Chaucer's life it is unhappily necessary to mention, in order that they be recognised when met with, some entirely fanciful statements about him which have disfigured most of his biographies, and are still often repeated. For many of these the imagination of the poet's first biographer, the antiquary Leland, who lived in the reign of Henry VIII., is primarily responsible, though later writers have improved on

his inventions. Thus Leland's ungrounded assertions that the poet was of noble birth, was born in Oxfordshire or Berkshire, and educated at Oxford have been rendered more specific by statements, equally untrue, that the name of one of Chaucer's ancestors is found on the roll of Battle Abbey, that he was born at Woodstock and educated at Merton College, while a foolish way of reading his poems has caused him to be connected with "Soler Hall" at Cambridge. Again, the inclusion in an early edition of his works of a poem dated 1402 at one time persuaded antiquaries to postpone his death till after that year, though the poem is avowedly by Hoccleve. On the other hand, until quite recently all his biographers have assigned his birth to the year 1328, when, as we now know, his father was still unmarried. Confusion with Thomas Chaucer has caused the poet's name to be traditionally connected with Woodstock (where, it is true, he may have resided when in attendance on the King) and with Donnington, in Berkshire, in both of which places Thomas Chaucer held property. All these statements are false, or at least unfounded, but they do the poet no harm. This, however, is not the case with the remarkable tissue of assertions which has been woven out of some passages in the *Testament of Love*, a prose treatise which cannot possibly be by the poet, who is expressly mentioned in it as the writer's "master." By the stupidly imaginative persons to whom this legend is due Chaucer is represented as having engaged in 1384 in a plot against his patron, Richard II., in consequence of which he was obliged to flee from justice, remaining for two years in exile in Hainault, France, and Zealand. On his venturing to return he was thrown, so we are informed, into prison, and only won his release by dishonourably betraying his associates. Fortunately

for the poet's reputation this disgraceful story is demonstrably false, for during the years of his supposed exile we know from the State Records that he was living in London and receiving his pension with his own hands. An account of these and other misstatements about Chaucer's life will be found in the interesting chapter entitled the "Chaucer Legend" in Professor T. R. Lounsbury's *Studies in Chaucer* (vol. i. pp. 129-224). For our purpose here it is sufficient to have nailed to the counter a few of the worst of them.

CHAPTER II

CHAUCER, THE STUDENT

§ 23. **Chaucer's Reading.**—We have seen something of Chaucer's love of books (§ 20), and now, before we turn to his own career as a poet, we must look at him for a few minutes as a student of the works of other men. The industry of the literary detectives of many nations enables us to track out, probably with no very great incompleteness, the books he had glanced at, the books he had read and used, and the little handful which he seems to have known almost by heart. If we thus follow Chaucer into his study we shall be the better able to appreciate both his own poetical development and his unique position in English literature. In a subsequent chapter we shall have to record the various originals from which he translated or otherwise built up many of his poems. Here we have to take a wider glance and consider briefly the works in prose and verse by which he was influenced.

§ 24. **Earlier English Literature.**—Chaucer has often been called the Father of English Poetry, and

the phrase is to this extent true that he is the first English poet who exercised an abiding influence on his successors, himself owing practically nothing to earlier English literature. Of the story of Beowulf, of the poems of Caedmon and Cynewulf it is unlikely that he had ever heard, nor is it any more probable that he had ever read a line of Layamon's *Brut* or the *Ormulum*, or that, if either of these poems had been put into his hands, he could have done anything more than spell it out with some difficulty. The French-speaking barons who led the English people in their struggles for liberty under John and Henry III. did away with the old hatred of the usurping speech, and for sixty years the French language gained an ever wider popularity in England. The danger to the national language was, perhaps, not so great as has sometimes been represented. While the knowledge of French was spreading among the middle, and even the lower classes, the use of English was spreading no less among the nobility, and was soon to gain complete ascendency. But the nobles could not as yet appreciate literature in the vulgar tongue, and to English literature the first effect of the new welding together of classes was disastrous. No important work of English prose and, with the exception of the *Owl and the Nightingale*, no original English poem of any length was written between 1220 and 1300. During the second and third quarters of this thirteenth century what Englishmen, even the most patriotic Englishmen, had to write they wrote either in Latin or in French, and when, about 1280, composition in English revived, almost exclusively it took the form of translation. For Chaucer it was with these translations that English literature began. How far he was acquainted with the *Cursor Mundi*, the *Ayenbite of Inwyt*, the *Handlyng Synne*, and the many ver-

sions now made of the French Romances and Lives of the Saints we cannot say. As we have seen, his family was connected with the Court, where French was still fashionable, and he himself went to school before the fashion of construing Latin into French and not into English had been abandoned. Thus he probably grew up, as a clever child in Wales may grow up now, knowing two languages, one as well as the other, and he may well have preferred in any given case to read a book in the original rather than in an English version. In his delightful parody of the long-winded romances, he alluded by name to some seven of them, of most of which English versions still exist, and it is probable that he had glanced at these, if only for the purpose of his parody. But he certainly owed nothing to his predecessors, except that they had set a fashion of translating and imitating from the French, and that it was in this fashion of translation and imitation that he made his first essays in poetry.

§ 25. **Mediæval Latin Literature.**—The place of the older vernacular literature was supplied to Chaucer by the Latin poetry and prose in which, for a few centuries, the literary ability of all Europe found a common meeting-ground. The writers of the twelfth century were his chief favourites, and in the twelfth century the English Latinists were at their best. There are references or quotations in Chaucer which show that he knew at least four of the chief of these—Geoffrey of Monmouth, "English Galfrid," as he calls him, whose *Historia Britonum* shocked serious historians by its tales of the Trojans in Britain and the court of Arthur; Walter Map, whose anti-matrimonial treatise, *Valerius ad Rufinum de non ducenda uxore*, supplied the poet with some of his too many gibes at women; Nigel Wircker, whose *Speculum Stultorum*, or tale of "Dan Burnell the

Ass," hit so hard at the follies and vices of the time; and John of Salisbury, the secretary of Thomas à Becket, and the author of the *Polycraticus sive De Nugis Curialium*, which embraced at once a satire on the vices of courts and a bold contribution to the controversy between church and king. Among the Latin works of this twelfth century written by foreigners Chaucer also knew well the prose treatise *De Contemptu Mundi sive de Miseria Conditionis Humanae* of the great mediæval pope, Innocent III., and, moreover, translated it, either in whole or part. He knew, too, the works of Alain de l'Isle (Alanus de Insulis), the Cistercian Bishop of Auxerre, three of which he quotes or refers to; also the *Alexandreis* of Gualtier de Lille. From his readings in the authors of the thirteenth century we may note his reference to Bradwardine's treatise, *De Causa Dei*, his use of the great collection of lives of the saints, the *Golden Legend* of Jacobus de Voragine, Archbishop of Genoa, and of the *Historia Trojana*, in which Guido da Colonna, borrowing from his forgotten predecessor, Benoit de Sainte Maur, summed up the mediæval legends of the story of Troy. To complete this list, as far as it has yet been made out, the names of about a dozen more Latinists might be added, but with these we need not concern ourselves. What we have here to note is the abundance of the Latin literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and the fact that Chaucer was well acquainted with it.

§ 26. **Classical Literature.**—This is, perhaps, the best place to glance for a moment at the extent of Chaucer's acquaintance with the masterpieces of classical Latin. Here his reading appears to have been that of the ordinary literary man of his day. To him, as to others, there storehouses of tales, the

Metamorphoses and *Heroides* of Ovid, were thoroughly familiar, and he knew also most of his other works. Virgil's *Aeneid* also he knew well, and the *Thebaid* of Statius, with some of the works of Claudian, and a little of Juvenal and Persius. Though he frequently alludes to Livy it is doubtful if he knew either this author or Suetonius at first hand, or anything of Cicero save his *De Divinatione* and the incident of Scipio's Dream (*Somnium Scipionis*) in the *Republic*. On the other hand, with Seneca and Boethius (whose *De Consolatione Philosophiae* he translated) he was probably far better acquainted than any poet of the present day In common with his contemporaries, Chaucer was also well read in two Latin works of the fifth century—the Commentary of the Neo-Platonist Macrobius on the *Somnium Scipionis* mentioned above, and Marcian's *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, a scientific treatise enlivened by a pretty romance of the marriage of Learning and Mercury. Of Greek, it is needless to say, he knew nothing, his knowledge of the Tale of Troy being derived from Virgil and Guido da Colonna and the two Latin forgeries attributed to Dares Phrygius and Dictys Cretensis. Of the Latin Vulgate version of the Bible his knowledge, if not very accurate, was considerable.

§ 27. **French Literature.**—As we have seen, the translation and imitation of French poems and treatises formed the first-fruits of the revival of English literature which took place in the half-century preceding Chaucer's birth, and he himself followed this fashion. The great poem which he selected to translate was the *Roman de la Rose*, and later on we shall have to consider whether the extant translation of portions of this work is wholly or in any part by Chaucer. But quite apart from this thorny question a knowledge of the nature and

contents of the French poem is essential to a right understanding of Chaucer's development, for it exercised on him an influence greater than that of any other single work, supplying him with poetic forms and machinery which he was slow to outgrow, and with reminiscences of particular passages which leave their trace on some of his best and latest work. We must, therefore, find space for a brief account of this remarkable poem.

§ 28. **Guillaume de Lorris.**—The *Roman de la Rose* consists in all of rather over 22,000 octosyllabic lines rhyming in couplets. The first part of the poem —some 4150 in length—was written about 1237 by a young clerk named Guillaume de Lorris, who died before he could bring it to a completion. In his poem he feigns that in his twentieth year he had fallen asleep, and dreamed that on a beautiful morning in May he had come to a garden surrounded by a high wall, on the outer side of which were painted all the disagreeable vices and troubles of life—Hatred, Covetousness, Sadness, Old Age, Hypocrisy, Poverty, and the like—as if to show that within the garden these could have no place. Attracted by the song of the birds he searched for an entrance, and at length found a little gate guarded by a fair maiden named Idleness, who told him that the garden belonged to Sir Mirth, and allowed him to enter. Soon he espies Mirth accompanied by Dame Gladness and the God of Love himself, attended by a bachelor, Sweet-Looking, who bare bows and arrows. With them were many fair ladies—Beauty, Riches, Largesse, Fraunchise, and Courtesy,—all of whom are elaborately described. Then he surveys all the garden, and comes to the well where Narcissus perished, and at last approaches a rose-bush, and essays to pull one of the buds. As he hesitates,

Love pierces him with his arrows, and henceforth all his thoughts are set on obtaining the rosebud. He becomes Love's vassal, and receives his commandments, rather tediously conveyed in some 800 lines. "Bel Accueil" (Good Reception) then helps him, but he is hindered by "Danger" (Guardianship), Slander, Shame, and Fear. He attempts too hastily to kiss the Rose, and is repulsed, and Reason then essays to argue him out of his passion. Fraunchise (Generosity), Pity, and Venus herself befriend him, but Slander and Jealousy are now aroused, and Bel Accueil, without whose help he cannot obtain the Rose, is imprisoned in a tower. The Lover then begins a lament, and in the midst of this monologue the poem breaks off abruptly. If, like many other mediæval compositions, a little tedious, so far as Guillaume de Lorris carried it, this wooing of the Rose is a very charming poem, full of skilful descriptions and instinct with the sentiment of the time. The dream, the May morning, the fair garden, the allegory, and personifications, all these became part of the machinery of later poets, and, as we shall see, Chaucer did not fail to avail himself of them, like the rest.

§ 29. **Jean de Meung.**—More than forty years after the death of Guillaume de Lorris his unfinished work was taken up by another young poet, Jean Clopinel, called from his birthplace Jean de Meung, then a student at Paris. The metre of the continuation was the same as that of the original, many of the characters were the same, the interrupted lamentation of the Lover was duly taken up and finished, and his suit of the Rose brought to a happy end; but the spirit of the poem was wholly changed. Guillaume de Lorris had set out to write an allegory of Love as the fair ladies of his day imagined it; his

continuator wrote on every topic of mediæval life, and his standpoint was not that of the fair ladies but that of their bitter satirist. When the Lover ceases lamenting, Reason argues with him once more, this time in a speech of 3000 lines, after which, at scarcely less length, "Ami," the Friend, details to him all the tricks of mediæval intrigue. False-Seeming, who is wont to attire himself as a Dominican monk, entraps and murders Slander, one of the four guardians of the castle, and the Duenna, "la Vieille," a very hateful person, is gained over to the Lover's side. But still the Rose cannot be won. A set battle ensues, in which the allegorical personages show their prowess, but though helped by Venus herself, the Lover is again repulsed. Art and Nature are called to aid, and at the bidding of Nature Genius disarms all opposition, and at last the beautiful Rose is won, and the sleeper awakes. But in the second part the story has become a mere thread on which to string endless discourses, in which questions of life and conduct, of destiny and free-will, of religion and morals, of marriage and celibacy, are unsparingly handled. Against women and against the clergy, especially the Dominicans, the satire is merciless and unceasing, and the poem was severely condemned, not to the diminution of its popularity. To Chaucer it was a storehouse from which he was never tired of drawing, and his own intellectual life may be represented, not unjustly, as a progress from the standpoint of Guillaume de Lorris to that of Jean de Meung. For the latter, bold as he was, was not irreligious, and some of his other works, which also Chaucer had read, are said to exhibit a most sincere piety. Like many another good Catholic, he satirised the accidental weaknesses of a religion in which he none the less believed, and we shall

find later on that in this also Chaucer imitated him.

§ 30. **Other French Writers.**—In addition to the two parts of the *Roman de la Rose* and some of the other works of Jean de Meung, Chaucer was acquainted with and used the Anglo-Norman chronicle of Nicolas Trivet and the *Pèlerinage de la vie humaine* (prototype of our *Pilgrim's Progress*) of Guillaume de Deguilleville, both writers of the first half of the fourteenth century. Next, however, to Jean de Meung, the French writer who influenced him most was Guillaume de Machault. From Machault he may, perhaps, have made a translation, the *Book of the Lion*, which is mentioned among his works, but has long been lost. Imitations of Machault have also been traced in some of Chaucer's extant poems, and it was from Machault that the English poet borrowed his two most successful metres, the seven-line stanza and the decasyllabic couplet. With Machault's disciple, Eustache Deschamps, who hailed him as "grand translateur, noble Geoffroy Chaucer," our poet was on terms of literary friendship: as also with the chronicler Froissart and Sir Otes de Granson, a pensioner of Richard II., and "flour of hem that make in Fraunce," from whom he translated a group of short poems. At a time when Englishmen were still writing verse in French the intercourse between the poets of the two nations must have been considerable, despite the constant wars, and Chaucer himself was doubtless familiar with much contemporary French verse which has left no mark on his own poetry. But the intellectual influence of the *Roman de la Rose* and the metrical influence of Guillaume de Machault stand out as two important factors contributed by French literature to our poet's development.

§ 31. **Italian Literature—Dante.**—As we have seen (§ 12), Chaucer's first mission to Italy lasted from December 1372 to November of the following year. A half-century had only just elapsed since the death of the great national poet (14th September 1321), broken-hearted and in exile, but already Florence was establishing a Dante professorship, and on 23rd October 1373, probably a few days after Chaucer had left Italy, the first lecture was delivered by no less a man than Boccaccio. To a fame thus established the English poet was not likely to be indifferent, and an invocation to the Blessed Virgin, imitated from the *Paradiso*, canto xxxiii., occurs in a poem, which may have been written before his second visit to Italy, though it bears some appearance of being a later addition. After Chaucer's return from his second mission in 1379 references to Dante are more frequent, and show a wider acquaintance with his great work, so that we may guess that the poet was then able to purchase a complete manuscript of the *Divina Commedia* for himself. Of Dante's other works he appears to have been ignorant, and even the *Divine Comedy* does not seem to have directly influenced more than a hundred lines of his poetry. But two interesting fragments have justly been ascribed to him in which he uses Dante's metre; and there can be no doubt that in one of his poems, the *Hous of Fame*, he takes the form of the *Commedia* as his model. The temper of the two poets was widely different, and Chaucer, of whom a contemporary, doubtless ignorant of Italian, could say that he had written "Dante in English," though indebted to his great predecessor artistically, imbibed none of his sternness of soul.

§ 32. **Boccaccio.**—Far more important than that of Dante was the influence upon Chaucer of his own

contemporary, Boccaccio, and, if we may believe him, of "Fraunceys Petrark, the laureat poete," whom he even speaks of in one place as "my master." Yet of Petrarch Chaucer's works only prove an acquaintance with his Latin version of Boccaccio's tale of Grisilde, and with a single sonnet (the eighty-eighth). To Boccaccio's *Teseide* and *Filostrato*, on the other hand, he was indebted for something more than the groundwork of two of his most important poems; and he was also acquainted with three of his works in Latin prose. If, as is somewhat hardily maintained, he also knew the *Decamerone*, and took from it, in however improved a fashion, the idea of his Canterbury Pilgrimage and the plots of any or all of the four tales (besides that of Grisilde) to which resemblances have been traced in his own work, his obligations to Boccaccio become immense. Yet he never mentions his name, and it has been contended that he was himself unaware of the authorship of the poems and treatises to which he was so greatly indebted. Strange as this seems to us, it is by no means incredible; for it was the exception rather than the rule for a fourteenth-century manuscript to mention the name of its author, unless posthumous fame had made it important; and there is some good ground for believing that Chaucer imagined himself indebted to Petrarch for the works which were really Boccaccio's. Whether this be so or not, and whether Boccaccio be hidden behind that mysterious "auctor Lollius," to whom Chaucer alludes as an authority on the history of Troy, we need not here inquire.

§ 33. **Variety of Chaucer's Reading.**—Just as all we know about Chaucer's career in the King's service has been laboriously pieced together out of dull records of old payments, so the foregoing account of

the chief literary influences which swayed his career as a poet is based upon the industry of the scholars who have tracked to their sources the references, quotations, and parallels which they found in his works, and have thus enabled us to identify the books which he had read, so we may fairly conclude, with the greatest interest. Both in the one field and in the other fresh discoveries may yet be made, but we have good reason to be grateful for what has already been done. The prosaic realities of Chaucer's life are ten times more varied and interesting than the career which Leland provided for him; and if he was by no means so "acute" a "logician," so "profound" a "philosopher," or so "able" a "mathematician" as Leland would have us believe, abundant proof has been obtained of both the width and the wisdom of his reading. When we remember the costliness of books in the fourteenth century, we may well rejoice that Chaucer was lucky enough to obtain so many that were really useful to the development of his genius.

CHAPTER III

THE CONTENTS AND ORDER OF CHAUCER'S WRITINGS

§ 34. **Early Printed Editions of Chaucer.**—In the days when all books were in manuscript it was only very rarely indeed that the writings of an author were collected into a single volume, or set of volumes, and labeled his "Works." No such manuscript of Chaucer is known to exist, and when William Caxton, with wise promptitude, probably the year after he set up his press at Westminster, began to print Chaucer's writings, he issued those he was able to

obtain in at least six different volumes. To his edition of the *Book of Fame* Caxton added a commendation of the poem and its author, which shows the estimation in which Chaucer was held towards the close of the first century after his death. "For he toucheth in it," Caxton says, "right great wisdom and subtle understanding, and so in all his works he excelleth in mine opinion all other writers in our English. For he writeth no void words, but all his matter is full of high and quick sentence: to whom ought to be given laud and praising for his noble making and writing. For of him all others have borrowed since and taken, in all their well saying and doing." So thought Caxton, and doubtless if he had been able to obtain a complete set of manuscripts, he would gladly have printed everything that Chaucer ever wrote. But collected editions were not yet the fashion, and it was not until 1532, after the lapse of another half-century, that a single volume professing to contain all of Chaucer's works was at last issued, under the editorship of William Thynne.

In 1532 Chaucer had been dead 132 years, and his fame was very great. Everybody knew that he was the author of the *Canterbury Tales* and *Troilus and Cressida*, but the difficulty of determining his minor works was doubtless considerable. Thynne took the right course, and erred on the side of liberality, preserving several poems, some good, some poor, which we now know could not have been written by Chaucer. The poet's fame acted as a magnet, and subsequent editors imitated Thynne's liberality only too freely. Many poems, some of them very unworthy of him, have thus been wrongly attributed to Chaucer, and it is only within the last thirty years that these have been successfully separated from his

real work. This has been done by placing on one side the poems of his authorship of which we have absolute and indisputable evidence, and examining their language and system of versification. The result of this examination is to show that, both as regards language and versification, Chaucer's usages were quite remarkably consistent, and that they differed in many important respects from those of other poets of his time. A brief account of these usages will be found in a subsequent chapter. For the present we may be content in the first place to ascertain what poems can be proved by certain evidence to be Chaucer's, and to confine ourselves at first to these. The knowledge we shall thus gain will help us hereafter in deciding on the claims of the other pieces which have been attributed to him to be really his.

§ 35. **Works ascribed to Chaucer by himself and his Contemporaries.**—We might fairly take the authenticity of the poems assigned to Chaucer by Caxton in the century after his death as a matter of notoriety, but we need not do so. His younger contemporary Lydgate (1370?-1445?) mentions Chaucer as the author of the *Canterbury Tales*, and in the conversation which takes place before one of these tales (that assigned to the Man of Law) Chaucer refers at some length to his *Legende of Good Women*, which he calls, quaintly enough, "the seintes legendes of Cupide," *i.e.* the Legends of Cupid's Saints. Now in a remarkable passage in the *Legende* he gives a list of his principal works up to the date of writing, and names specifically a translation of the *Roman de la Rose*, *Troilus and Cressida*, the *Hous of Fame*, the *Dethe of Blaunche the Duchesse*, the *Parlement of Foules*, and his prose translation of Boethius's *De Consolatione*. All his chief works are thus inseparably linked to-

gether, and we may join to them the *Lines to Adam Scrivener*, in which the author of *Troilus* and the *Boece* complains of the carelessness with which they have been copied out. But again Lydgate, in the same prologue to his *Fall of Princes*, in which he mentions the *Canterbury Tales*, also mentions as Chaucer's (besides most of the works already enumerated) the story of *Anelida and Arcyte* and (by allusion to one passage in it) the *Compleynt of Mars*, as also the prose treatise on the Astrolabe, which Chaucer addressed to his little son Lewis. The same contemporary, in his translation of Guillaume de Deguilleville's *Pèlerinaige de la vie humaine*, further alludes to a translation by Chaucer of a hymn to the Blessed Virgin, which occurs in it, and is known as the *A B C*. Seven other poems are vouched for as Chaucer's by John Shirley (1366?-1456), an earnest lover of the poet, and, like Lydgate, born sufficiently early, if dates can be trusted, to have known him personally. These seven poems are the *Exclamacion of the Dolur of Pite* (usually quoted as the *Compleynt to Pite*, from the title of its second part), *Fortune*, *Truth*, *Gentilesse*, *Lak of Stedfastnesse*, a triplet of ballades translated from Sir Otes de Granson, miscalled by Shirley the *Compleynt of Venus*, and the *Compleynt to his Empty Purs*. To these we may add an eighth, the set of metrical experiments called by Professor Skeat Chaucer's *Compleynt to his Lady*. These, though not specifically headed as Chaucer's, are joined on by Shirley to his copy of the *Pite*, and thus sufficiently avouched. Lastly, we have the evidence of reasonably good manuscripts for the ascription to Chaucer of the newly-discovered *To Rosemounde*, of the *Envoy to Scogan*, the *Envoy to Bukton*, the *Former Age*, and the two quatrains known as Chaucer's *Proverbs*, and with these we close the list of the poems for whose authenticity we

can produce external evidence. For greater clearness we may look at them again, arranged in a table:—

Common notoriety confirmed by Lydgate	avouches	*Canterbury Tales.*
Canterbury Tales (Man of Lawes Head-link)	..	*Legende of Good Women.*
Legende of Good Women	..	A translation of the *Roman de la Rose.* *Troilus and Cressida.* *House of Fame.* *Dethe of Blaunche.* *Parlement of Foules.* *Boece* (prose). *Lines to Adam Scrivener.*
Lydgate—		
i. In Prologue to *Fall of Princes*	..	**Anelida and Arcyte.* **Compleynt of Mars.* *Astrolabe* (prose).
ii. In Translation of Deguilleville	..	**A B C.* ** Ascribed to Chaucer also by Shirley.*
Shirley MSS.	..	*Pite.* *Compleynt to his Lady* (copied as a continuation of *Pite*). *Fortune.* *Truth.* *Gentilesse.* *Lak of Stedfastnesse.* Balladles from Granson (called *Compleynt of Venus*). *Compleynt to his Purs.*
Ascription in other Manuscripts	..	*To Rosemounde.* *Envoy to Scogan.* *Envoy to Bukton.* *The Former Age.* *Proverbs.*

§ 36. **Corroborative Evidence of Genuineness.**—The foregoing table exhibits fairly well the comparative weight of external evidence in favour of the ascription to Chaucer of each of the poems it contains. For the more important poems we are fortunate in having the testimony of Chaucer himself, although in the one case of the translation of the *Roman de la Rose* it is disputed whether the testimony refers to the version which has actually come down to us or to another translation now lost. For three out of twelve other pieces we have the witness both of Lydgate and Shirley, for one of Lydgate alone, and for eight only of Shirley. Four other poems are avouched by anonymous scribes, whose ascriptions do not carry the weight of Shirley or Lydgate. Here, however, internal evidence comes to help us out. In the first place, the usages as to metre and language which we find observed in the poems claimed by Chaucer himself (putting on one side the *Romaunt of the Rose*) are observed also in all the other poems on our list, and as Chaucer's usages were much stricter than those of other poets, his contemporaries, this negative evidence is a very strong corroboration of a scribe's assertion. In the second place, some special argument of authenticity can be brought forward in favour of almost every several poem, and in some instances these arguments are so strong that Chaucer's authorship is as certain as in the case of the *Canterbury Tales* themselves. Thus—to take the last four poems on our list—in the *Envoy to Bukton* there is an allusion to the Wife of Bath, a lady very prominent in the *Tales*: in the *Envoy to Scogan* there are allusions which exactly fit in with what we know from other sources of Chaucer's circumstances and employments (§ 18). The *Former Age* is practically a translation of one of the "metres"

or interludes in verse in Boethius's *De Consolatione* (translated by Chaucer into prose), and has a family connection with the four poems *Fortune*, *Truth*, *sqq.* on the Shirley list. Even the two rather insignificant *Proverbs* can claim that the adage on which one of them is founded is, as Professor Skeat has remarked, quoted in one of the *Canterbury Tales*. If any one pleases to maintain that they are not Chaucer's, the *Proverbs* are not worth fighting for, though as attributed to him on fair authority they may be allowed a place among his works. Of the other poems on the list (always excepting the *Romaunt*) the authenticity is indisputable.

§ 37. **Three Points raised by List in Legende of Good Women.**—We must now return once more to the list which Chaucer gives of his own writings in his Prologue to the *Legende of Good Women*. As a pleasant change from our table we may quote the passage somewhat fully. The poet tells us how, after gazing on his favourite flower, the daisy, he had gone to sleep in a little "herber" or arbour, and dreamed that he saw the God of Love approaching him with his Queen and nineteen fair ladies. The God of Love asked who he was, and on learning, upbraided him as one unworthy to approach the daisy:—

> Quod he 'what dostow heer,
> So nigh myn owné flour, so boldély?
> For it were better worthy, trewély,
> A worm to neghen neer my flour than thou."
> "And why, sir," quod I, "and hit lykė yow?"
> 'For thou," quod he, "art therto nothing able,
> Hit is my relik, digne and delytable,
> And thou my fo, and al my folk werreyest,
> And of myn owné servaunts thou misseyest,
> And hindrest hem, with thy translacioun,
> And lettest folk from hir devocioun
> To servė me, and holdest hit folye
> To servė Love. Thou mayst hit nat denye:

For in pleyn texte, withouten nede of glose,
Thou hast translated the *Romaunce of the Rose*,
That is an heresye ageyns my lawe,
And makest wyse folk fro me withdrawe,
And of *Cresyde* thou hast said as thee liste,
That maketh men to wommen lasse triste
That ben as trewe as ever was any steel."

But the Queen of Love pleads in Chaucer's behalf, and puts forward his writings on the other side.

All be hit that he can nat wel endyte,

she says compassionately,

Yet hath he made [the] lewed folk delyte
To serve you, in preysing of your name.
He made the book that hight the *Hous of Fame*,
And eek the *Death of Blaunche the Duchesse*,
And the *Parlement of Foules*, as I gesse,
And al the love of *Palamon and Arcyte*
Of Thebes, though the story is knowen lyte;
And many an ympne for your holydayes,
That highten *Balades*, *Roundels*, *Virelayes*:
And for to speke of other holynesse
He hath in prose translated *Boece*
[And of the *Wrecched Engendring of Mankynde*,
As men may in pope Innocent y-lyrade:]
And mad the *Lyf* also of *Seynt Cecyle*;
He made also, goon sithen a greet whyle,
Origenes upon the Maudeleyne:
Him oghte now to have the lasse peyne:
He hath mad many a lay and many a thing.

Now in addition to the information it has already yielded us, this passage makes clear three very important points—

(i.) That several of Chaucer's poems are now lost.
(ii.) That he was in the habit of recasting his work.
(iii.) That when he began to write his *Canterbury Tales* he included among them some poems which he already had by him.

On each of these points we must say a few words.

(i.) LOST WORKS AND THEIR FATE.—It will be

noted that in the passage quoted mention is made not only of many *Balades*, *Roundels*, *Virelayes*, which are hardly at all represented in Chaucer's works, as we now have them, but also of "al the love of Palamon and Arcyte," of translations of Innocent III.'s treatise, *De Miseria Conditionis Humanae* (§ 25), and of the homily on St. Mary Magdalene, falsely attributed to Origen. By Lydgate again, and in a list of Chaucer's works given in most manuscripts at the end of the *Canterbury Tales* (see § 77), there is mention of a *Book of the Lion*, supposed to have been a translation of *Le Dit du Lion* by Guillaume Machault (§ 30). Perhaps we should add that in the Man of Law's Head-link in the *Tales* it is said of Chaucer—

> In youthe he made of Ceys and Alcioun;

and by Lydgate also there is a reference to

> The pytous story of Ceix and Alcion
> And the Deth also of Blaunché the Duchesse.

But as the incident of Ceyx and Alcione occupies no less than 158 out of the 290 lines which form the proem to the *Dethe*, we may fairly assume that it is important enough to be named separately without insisting on the possibility of its having formed the chief subject of an independent poem now lost. None of the other works now exist, but at least two of them have left their traces upon poems which have come down to us. Prefixed to the Man of Law's Tale is a prologue on the evils of poverty, which has little or no connection with the story. Four out of the five stanzas of this prologue are translated from Innocent III., as are also three several other stanzas and one half-stanza in the body of the tale. It seems at least possible that Chaucer was here using up old work. The case of *Palamon*

and Arcyte is still stronger. The best scholars believe that, previously to the version of this story which we find in the *Knightes Tale*, Chaucer had composed a more literal translation of Boccaccio's *Teseide* in seven-line stanzas, and that this earlier poem he withdrew from circulation, using fragments of it as the basis for ten stanzas in *Anelida and Arcyte*, for three stanzas of *Troilus and Cressida*, for sixteen stanzas in the *Parlement of Foules*, and probably for many of the passages in the *Knightes Tale*, in which he appears to be translating or imitating Boccaccio.

(ii.) CHAUCER'S REVISION OF HIS WORK.—It may have been noted that two of the lines of our quotation are in brackets. This is because they are taken from a version of the prologue differing from the rest. Both versions exist in their entirety, and the differences between them are considerable; so here is another instance in which Chaucer re-wrote his own work. These extreme examples will prepare us to find that in other poems also Chaucer made alterations and additions at a date subsequent to that of their first composition.

(iii.) EARLY POEMS AMONG THE CANTERBURY TALES.—In the quotation from the *Legende* there is a reference to a *Lyf of Seint Cecyle*, but we find this Lyf among the *Canterbury Tales*, where it is assigned to the Second Nun. In its place there it still retains marks that it was not originally composed as one of the *Tales*, for in the preliminary Invocation to the Blessed Virgin the narrator is spoken of as a "*son* of Eve," and asks the forgiveness of "yow that reden that I wryte." We cannot imagine that Chaucer would have deliberately made a nun, telling a story to riders along the highroad, speak of herself as a man, and of her audience as her readers, and we are forced to believe that the poem was originally written

with no reference to the Canterbury Pilgrimage. If this be so with one tale it may be so with others, and we shall not be surprised, therefore, if we find that there are four poems, including this, which were probably written before the scheme of the Canterbury Pilgrimage assumed shape, and afterwards inserted into it with such amount of revision as Chaucer could find time for.

§ 38. **Order and Dates of Chaucer's Works.**—We approach now a difficult subject—the chronology of Chaucer's writings. It is difficult, because the writings are numerous, amounting altogether, if we count each Canterbury Tale separately, to no less than forty-five pieces in verse and four in prose; and also because Chaucer lived before the days when every book has, or ought to have, an accurately dated title-page. But it is not exceptionally difficult, and, on the whole, we know the order of Chaucer's writings almost as well as those of Shakspere, and much better than we should have known these last if we had not the help of the dates on some of the plays published during his life. It is true that now and again somebody will cheerfully make hay of every known fact in Chaucer's life in order to assign an impossibly wrong date to a particular poem, just as every now and then some one tries to prove that Shakspere wrote the *Tempest* immediately after the *Midsummer Night's Dream*. But about the approximate dates of the great majority of Chaucer's poems there is a general agreement among all those who have studied the question, and we must now see how this agreement has been reached, and where it ceases.

(1) Allusions from Poem to Poem.—Our first great help in determining the order of Chaucer's writings is that we know that the *Canterbury Tales*

in their collected form are later than the *Legende of Good Women*, to which allusion is made in the Man of Law's Head-link (§ 35), and that the *Legende* also is necessarily later than any of the six extant and three lost works, which are enumerated in its prologue. Among these are *Troilus and Cressida* and the *Hous of Fame*, and we are fortunate in being able to fix the order of these important poems by internal evidence. Now the *Troilus* is a tragedy in the sense in which Chaucer himself defines the word, for in it Fortune assails "with unwar stroke the regnes that ben proude," and the *Hous of Fame* is by its construction a mediæval "comedy" on the model of Dante's great work. When, therefore, we find Chaucer writing at the end of the *Troilus*—

> Go, litel boke, go, litel myn tragédie!
> Ther God my maker, yet er that I dye,
> So sende me myght to maken som comedye!

we see at once that he is intending to write the *Hous of Fame*, and thus we get the *Troilus*, the *Hous of Fame*, the *Legende of Good Women*, and the *Canterbury Tales* fixed in their right order. Moreover, in the *Lines to Adam Scrivener*, the translation of Boethius is joined to the *Troilus* in a manner which suggests that the two works were completed about the same time, so of this work also we know the period.

(2) Poems containing External References. —But we can fix not merely the order of some of Chaucer's poems, but their approximate dates. Thus we know that the Duchess Blanche died on 12th September 1369, and the poem written in her memory must therefore have been composed in the winter of 1369-70. The *Parlement of Foules* again (this was first pointed out by Dr. Koch) is clearly written in honour of the marriage of Richard II. with Anne of

Bohemia, which took place 14th January 1382, and must accordingly belong to either 1381 or 1382. The *Hous of Fame* alludes to Chaucer's work at the Custom-House as if it were very exacting, and we know that his attendance, previously intermitted by diplomatic missions, was uninterrupted between 1380 and 1385. In the *Legende of Good Women* there are references to the Queen, and it must therefore have been written after January 1382. The poems called the *Compleynt of Venus* are translated from Sir Otes de Granson, a Savoyard, who was in England from 1391 to 1396, and at the close of 1393 received a pension from Richard II. Chaucer is said to have made his translation at the request of Isabella of York, who died in 1394, and we may therefore reasonably place it about the year 1393, when Granson was in favour at Court. In the *Envoy to Scogan* there appears to be an allusion to the heavy rains of the autumn of 1393, and this seems confirmed by Chaucer dating the poem from Greenwich, where his work as Commissioner of the Roadway between Woolwich and Greenwich would take him about that time (§ 18). In the *Envoy to Bukton* Professor Skeat has drawn attention to the allusion to the English expedition to Friesland, which lasted from August to October 1396. The poem entitled the *Compleynt to his Purs* must be connected with the grant by Henry IV. of the pension of 40 marks in October 1399 (§ 19). In this way we obtain certain dates for some poems and approximate ones for other. If we were only less uncertain about the date of Chaucer's marriage and the reality of his unsuccessful lovesuit the list might be extended.

(3) References to the Calendar, to Astronomy, and Astrology.—We now come to a peculiar class of references, which require to be interpreted with

great caution, but have yielded some remarkable results. The simplest form of them is supplied by the *Hous of Fame*. Chaucer, imitating the preciseness of Dante, distinctly tells us the day and the month of the dream in which the story is enshrined :—

> Of Decembre the tenthe day
> When hit was night, to slepe I lay, etc. (ll. 111, 112).

Moreover he tells us that it is by the direct interposition of Jupiter that he is brought to the House of Fame, and it is therefore by no means a forced deduction, according to the astrological lore of the day, that the dream must have taken place on the day of the week especially sacred to Jove, *i.e.* on a Thursday. Now the only year between 1380 and 1385 in which 10th December fell on a Thursday is 1383, and we may therefore hold it as most probable that the poem is meant to date from 10th December 1383, and was written early in 1384.

Again, we are told that the day on which the Man of Law was called on to tell his tale in the Canterbury Pilgrimage was 18th April. References to incidents on the journey make it clear that Canterbury itself was reached on the second day from this, *i.e.* on 20th April. Now, as the pilgrims were nearing Canterbury, about four o'clock on the afternoon of this day, the moon was seen beginning to rise in the middle of the constellation Libra. This we are told could only have happened at such an hour on such a day in the year 1385, and thus (if the most plausible interpretation of a difficult passage can be trusted) we get 17th or 18th April to 20th April 1385 as the actual date of the Pilgrimage which suggested to Chaucer the scheme of the *Canterbury Tales*, and the end of 1385 and beginning of 1386 as the most probable date of the *Prologue*.

Again, Dr. Koch has pointed out that in ll. 117-

119 of the *Parlement of Foules*, Chaucer tells us that he began to write this poem when the star Venus was visible in the north-west, *i.e.* as an evening star. This can only happen in the months of May, June, July, or August, and not in every year. Astronomers tell us that Venus was thus visible in 1374, 1377, 1380, 1382, and 1383, but not in 1381; and as for other reasons our choice of dates for this poem is confined to 1381 and 1382, we may feel fairly certain that it was written in the summer of 1382.

The deductions founded on the three references already mentioned have a very high degree of probability, but we must beware of unduly extending them to cases in which Chaucer may have had a reason for working out a scheme of dates and astral conjunctions for himself. For instance, the *Complaynt of Mars* is supposed to be an astrological allegory of a certain Court intrigue, about which Chaucer was bidden to write a poem. It so happens that the astral conjunctions which he devised for the purposes of his allegory actually came about in 1379. But in our ignorance of the date of the intrigue we have no right to fix on the year 1379 as the date of the poem, for Chaucer was quite capable of working out his allegory astrologically without obliging us to suppose that the stars of heaven fitted themselves to his purpose in the particular year when he was called upon for his poem. Doubtless there may have been such a coincidence, but we have no right to assume it. In the same way in his *Knightes Tale* Chaucer wanted to bring certain events on certain days of the week, chiefly because a Friday is astrologically sacred to the goddess Venus. If, as has been suggested by Professor Skeat, we fit these days to a possible year, we get a calculation of "this day fifty wekes" from Saturday, 5th May 1386, to

Sunday, 5th May 1387. It is very probable that this is about the time when Chaucer was actually engaged on the poem, but as he could have worked out his dates for himself with the greatest ease, and they have an astrological importance, it is hardly safe to conjecture that he wrote them from the current year.

§ 39. **Internal Evidence of Date.**—(1) ITALIAN INFLUENCE.—Many of the facts collected in the last few sections have only recently been published, and they put rather a new aspect upon a generalisation which has yet done excellent service in settling the chronology of Chaucer's poems. The year of Chaucer's first visit to Italy has been taken as a dividing line, and every poem which showed the influence of any Italian poet has been on that ground assigned a date subsequent to 1373. In § 12 we have anticipated the objection that Chaucer may previously already have possessed a considerable knowledge of Italian and Italian poetry. The *Dethe of Blaunche*, written in 1369-70, shows no trace of any such knowledge, and this strongly confirms the inherent improbability of Italian manuscripts having fallen in his way before he himself went to Italy—even if he had been able to read them. But we have already obtained the approximate dates of almost all the poems in which the influence of Italian poetry is prominent. We know that the *Parlement of Foules* was written in 1382, *Troilus and Cressida* not long before the *Hous of Fame*, the *Hous of Fame* in 1383, the *Legende of Good Women* subsequent to this and before the *Canterbury Tales*, the bulk of the *Tales* in or after 1385. There is no longer any reason to argue from the inherent improbability of Chaucer's acquaintance with *Dante* or *Boccaccio* before 1372. There is positive evidence that the poems which show traces of this acquaintance are,

as the old argument anticipated, of a later date. Nay, more, it cannot but strike us that every one of the poems we have named belongs to a date subsequent to 1379, *i.e.* subsequent not only to the first but also to the second visit to Italy. The question arises, Was it not on the later of the two Italian missions that the influence of Italian literature was for the first time strongly felt? The paraphrase of Dante in the *Lyf of Seint Cecyle* may seem to answer this question in the negative, for we have no reason for assigning a late date to this tale. But the paraphrase occurs not in the story itself, but in the Invocation to the Blessed Virgin, which is prefixed to and separate from it. It is in this Invocation that we find the references to the narrator as a "son of Eve," and the allusion to "readers" already mentioned. We cannot, therefore, suppose that it was inserted (as insertions were made in other poems) when it came up for revision as one of the *Canterbury Tales*. But the Invocation may have been written and added any time between 1379 and 1385; and if so, it would be impossible to point to any poem written before 1379 in which there is a trace of Italian influence. It is not necessary, however, to go so far as this. Chaucer may have read Dante and Boccaccio on his first visit to Italy, and even have made extracts from them, but it does not follow that he bought manuscripts of their works to take home with him. Up to the date of this mission he had had no very lucrative employments—when he went to France in 1369 he had to borrow £10 from a friend—and though his allowance on this occasion was considerable, it is doubtful if it left him any great margin for book-buying, at the price which books then cost. Moreover, if any books were purchased on this visit, it is more likely that they were

Latin ones than Italian, written in the language which Chaucer knew well, rather than in that which he was probably only just acquiring, and we know in fact of two Latin books by Boccaccio which it is probable he did obtain on this occasion. This is not the place in which to insist strongly on any new point, but it seems at least possible that Chaucer's intimate acquaintance with Italian should be dated from 1379 rather than 1372, and we shall find that this theory is certainly no hindrance, but rather a help, to our understanding Chaucer's development. The only poems which it will help us to date are the *Compleynt to his Lady* and the closely connected *Anelida and Arcyte*, both of which appear to have been written shortly after 1380.

(2) EVIDENCE OF METRE.—We have seen that the knowledge-of-Italian test in its original form comes to be rather a convenient generalisation of what we know by other evidence than a real witness to the date of any given poem, and we shall find that this applies to most of the other internal tests which have been proposed. For instance, it has been laid down as a "canon" that "nearly all of Chaucer's tales that are in stanzas are early, and nearly all that are in the usual [decasyllabic] couplets are late." This is a very convenient generalisation which may certainly be accepted, but it hardly amounts to either a test or a canon, inasmuch as one half of it is entirely arbitrary. It is true on the one hand that none of the poems mentioned in the *Legende of Good Women* are in decasyllabic couplets, and this affords a presumption that all poems written in this metre are later than the *Legende*, but does not prove that poems written in other metres are earlier. We know that Chaucer used stanzas of seven or eight lines up to the close of his career: we know that he used the seven-line stanza for

the *Parlement of Foules* as late as 1382; and curiously enough we cannot produce absolute proof of early date [*i.e.* earlier than 1382] for any poem in this metre, though we have good reasons for believing many of them to be early. These good reasons depend on the tone, sources, and style of each individual poem, and to no small extent on the fact that Chaucer's literary life from 1379 onwards is so crowded with poems which could only have been written after that date that there is a reasonable presumption that all other poems are earlier.

On these grounds, though with varying degrees of certainty, we are justified in assigning early dates, *i.e.* between 1370 and 1380, not only to the *Lyf of Seint Cecyle*, but to the *Story of Grisilde* (Clerk's Tale), the *Story of Constance* (Man of Law's Tale), and to a first draft of the "Tragedies of the Great," which were afterwards revised and added to and assigned to the jovial Monk. On the other hand, the story of the Martyred Chorister (Prioress's Tale), though it has been assigned to this period, is almost certainly later.

(3) Use of Boethius. — We have seen that Chaucer's prose translation of the *De Consolatione* was probably written about the same time as his *Troilus*, *i.e.* between 1380 and 1382. The book was so popular in the Middle Ages that we must not refuse Chaucer knowledge of it before he took the translation in hand, but in the poems we have good reason for placing earlier than 1380 (with the exception of the Monk's Tale) the influence of the *De Consolatione* is not apparent, while in later works passages inspired by it are very frequent. This is perhaps a reason for regarding the Monk's Tale as somewhat later than the Second Nun's, Clerk's, and Man of Law's, and it is also a reason for attributing the five poems, the *Former Age*, *Fortune*, *Truth*, *Gentilesse*,

and *Lak of Stedfastnesse*, all of which seem written more or less under the influence of Boethius, to the period subsequent to the translation, a period during which Chaucer's outward circumstances more than once caused him to need all the consolations which philosophy could bestow.

(4) Evidence of Style and Power.—We have left to the last, and cannot even yet treat at any length, the most important of the internal tests of date which Chaucer's works afford. His early poems are very beautiful, but they are sentimental and a little weak, with hardly a trace of humour and no great power of characterisation. In his later poems sentiment is replaced by a not unkindly cynicism; his sense of the beauty of religion has perhaps not diminished, but he himself is less religious and grosser; his subtle humour has become infinite, and with a few masterly strokes he portrays a character to the life. A similar change has come over his style. His verse has become much more closely packed, and each line seems to convey twice as much as before. To enlarge on these differences before we have examined the poems individually would be unfruitful. They are mentioned here because they come to the aid of evidence of other kinds, which by itself might seem weak or even fanciful. Moreover the consistent development in Chaucer's genius which we are able to trace when we read his poems in the order in which evidence, mainly external, suggests that they should be arranged, comes as a strong confirmation of our belief that the arrangement is on the whole trustworthy. Let us see then at what point we have so far arrived.

§ 40. **Summary.**—If we look back over the foregoing sections we shall see that a date, exact or approximate, has been suggested for all Chaucer's

extant works, with the exception[1] of the *A B C*, the *Exclamacion of the Dethe of Pite*, and the translation of the *Roman de la Rose*, the authenticity of the last being doubtful, though we know that *a* translation was made by Chaucer. An assertion made two hundred years after Chaucer's death tells us that the *A B C* was written for the use of the Duchess Blanche. But we cannot rely on this, and have no help towards dating the poem except its style, on the ground of which most critics regard it as the earliest of Chaucer's extant works. We are really in the same state of helplessness about the *Dethe of Pite*, but the desire to connect it with the hopeless love alluded to in the *Dethe of Blaunche* has caused it to be placed generally between 1367 and 1372. To the present writer it seems good enough to be later even than the second of these dates. As regards the *Romaunt of the Rose*, if the present version is in whole or part by Chaucer, it must be very early work, written before his principles of versification were fixed, *i.e.* considerably earlier than 1369. If Chaucer's version be wholly lost we can only say that there are some 22,000 lines in the *Roman*, and that the English poet may have occupied himself with the portion by Guillaume de Lorris any time during the sixties, to please the sentimental ladies at Court, while the influence of Jean de Meung's satire is only visible in his later work. There is a general agreement that all these three poems, the *A B C*, *Pite*, and *Romaunt*, were written before 1380, but there is no agreement which enables us to range them in their chronological order in Chaucer's writings. We must therefore place them apart by themselves in exhibiting the accompanying

[1] *Fo Recommande* is a fourth exception: its tone and style, and perhaps the fact that it is found in a MS. of *Troilus and Cressida*, all point to a date after 1380.

table of his works. The other works follow, with the dates, exact or approximate, which the investigations of which this chapter is a summary have enabled us to set against them, while in the last column the chief facts of the poet's life have been jotted down, so as to enable us to see what he was doing and how he was earning his living at each period of his poetical career. The centre column gives, in the briefest possible notes, the names of the author or work upon which Chaucer drew, whether by way of translation, paraphrase, or imitation, in writing each of his poems.

These notes suggest the four divisions under which we may now proceed to the detailed examination of the poet's works. Up to the date of his return from his second visit to Italy we find him practically, if not entirely, uninfluenced by Italian literature, and seeking inspiration from French and Latin sources. We take this as his first period, his apprenticeship, during which he did some very beautiful work, but had not yet found the true secret of his powers. During the next five years, 1380-84, we have three important poems, *Troilus*, the *Parlement*, and the *Hous of Fame*, and two minor ones, in all of which the influence of Dante or Boccaccio is strongly marked. This, then, is Chaucer's Italian period, and we see it drawing to a close in the *Legende of Good Women*, which he abandoned in favour of the *Canterbury Tales*. These, it is needless to say, enshrine Chaucer's best and most original work, and constitute a period in themselves, a period which begins in 1385 or 1386, but of which we cannot fix the end. One or two of the Tales are less successful than others, but we cannot say that any of them show signs of failing power. They represent just one half of Chaucer's extant work, and it is possible that he continued writing them up to the end of his life. It is more probable, however,

		Influenced by or Translated from	Notes on Chaucer's Life.
Before 1369	*A B C* (1369? Furnivall / 1380 Koch / After 1373 Ten Brink)	Guillaume de Deguilleville	In the King's household.
	Pité (1367? Furnivall / 1372-73 Ten Brink / 1374 Koch)		
	Romaunt of Rose? [Extant version if genuine, 1366-67?]	*Roman de la Rose*	
1369-70	*Dethe of Blaunche*	"Ceyx and Alcione," from Ovid, Reminiscences of Machault, and *Roman de la Rose*	
1372-80	*Life of Saint Cecile*, Second Nun's Tale, usually assigned to 1374, perhaps earlier	Story from *Legenda Aurea* (Invocation to Blessed Virgin from Dante)	First Mission to Italy, 1372-73.
	[*Story of Griselda*] Clerk's Tale, after 1373	Petrarch's Latin version of a tale by Boccaccio	Comptroller of Customs of Wool, 1374. Employed on diplomatic missions. Very busy and prosperous.
	[*Story of Constance*] Man of Law's Tale	Anglo-French Chronicle of Trivet (with numerous interpolations)	
	? [Twelve "*Tragedies*" of Great Men and Women]	Partly from Boccaccio's *De Casibus Virorum et Mulierum Illustrium*	
	Monk's Tale, after 1373	...	Second Mission to Italy, 1378-79.
	Compleynt of Mars Probably towards 1380		
About 1380	*Compleynt to his Lady* (A fragment)	Partly written in Dante's *terza rima*	
	Anelida and Arcyte (Unfinished)	Seventy lines from Boccaccio's *Teseide* and Statius' *Thebais*; rest original?	
	Boece	A prose version of the *De Consolatione*	Comptroller of Petty Customs, 1382.
1380-85	*Troilus and Cressida*	Freely adapted from Boccaccio's *Filostrato*	
	Lines to Adam Scrivener *To Rosemunde*		

1382	*Parliament of Fowls*	Lines 1 to 98 from Boccaccio's *Teseide*	Completed by Feast of St. Valentine, 1382.
1383-84	*House of Fame* (Unfinished)	Plan of poem and many passages modelled on *Divina Commedia*	His clerk-work presses hard on him.
1384-85	*Legende of Good Women* (Unfinished)	Ovid, Virgil, and two Latin works of Boccaccio	Probably goes on pilgrimage to Canterbury, 1385.
After 1385	*Canterbury Tales* Prologue. Talks on Road and nineteen out of twenty-three Tales	See § 73 *sqq.*	Knight of the Shire for Kent, 1386. Loses both his Comptroller ships, 1386. His wife dies, 1387. Sells his pension, 1388. Clerk of the King's Works, 1389.
(Any time after 1382)-1389-89?	*Former Age*	Boethius *De Consolatione*	Loses his Clerkship, 1391.
	Fortune	Boethius and *Roman de la Rose*	
	Truth	Partly suggested by Boethius	
	Gentilesse	Suggested by Boethius and *Roman*	
	Lak of Stedfastnesse	Suggested by Boethius	
1391	*Astrolabe*	Latin version of Arabic of Messahala	
1393	*Envoy to Scogan*		New pension granted by Richard II. 1394.
,, ?	*"Complaynt of Venus"*	Balladles by Sir Otes de Granson	
1396	*Envoy to Bukton*		
1399	*Complaynt to his Purs*		Additional pension granted by Henry IV. 1399. Death of Chaucer, 1400.

that the poetic impulse died away soon after 1390, and that the famous *Tales* were all compressed into some six or seven years. This leaves us only four poems belonging to what has been called Chaucer's period of decline, viz. the Envoys to Scogan and Bukton, the so-called *Compleynt of Venus* and the *Purs*. For greater convenience of treatment we shall include in the same chapter the fine Boethius group (*Truth*, *Gentilesse*, etc.) which may have been written any time after about 1382, and head the chapter "Later Minor Poems." Chaucer's work was so good right to the end that it is pleasant to be able to avoid the use of the word "decline" in connection with any of it.

CHAPTER IV

POEMS OF CHAUCER'S FIRST PERIOD

Chaucer at Work on French and Latin Models.—1360?-1379.

Note.—In addition to the extant works belonging to this period we must assign to it three translations now lost, viz. the *Book of the Lion*, borrowed from Guillaume Machault; the *Wrecched Engendryng of Mankynde*, translated from Pope Innocent III.; and the version of "Origenes *Upon the Maudelayne*" (see § 37).

§ 41. **The A B C.**—The *Roman de la Rose* called forth many imitations, among others a religious work by a French Cistercian, Guillaume de Deguilleville, who in the year 1330 began to write his *Pèlerinaige de la vie humaine*, to which he afterwards added a *Pèlerinaige de l'âme après mort* and a *Pèlerinaige de Jésus Christ*. The first of these three poems is sufficiently described by saying that

it served John Bunyan as a Catholic model for his Protestant *Pilgrim's Progress*. At one stage of his journey the Pilgrim is sorely beset by Avarice and Gluttony, and when *Grace-Dieu* has rescued him he implores the aid of the Blessed Virgin in a poetical prayer written according to the letters of the alphabet, so that the order of the verses might be better remembered. It is this prayer which is the original of Chaucer's poem. The French is written in stanzas of twelve octosyllabic lines, rhyming *aabaabbbabba*; Chaucer's imitation in stanzas of eight decasyllabic lines, rhyming *ababbcbc*. In the French there are two additional verses beginning with the contractions for *et* and *con*, which were often written at the end of the alphabet. These Chaucer omits. His opening lines are very fine :—

> Al-myghty and al-merciable Queene,
> To whom that al this world fleeth for socour
> To have relees of sinne, of sorwe and teene,
> Glorious Virgine, of allë flourës flour,
> To thee I flee confounded in errour!
> Help, and releeve, thou myghty debonayre,
> Have mercy on my perilous langour!
> Venquisshed me hath my cruelle adversaire.

But despite the aid of his three rhymes, as against Deguilleville's two, he is not at his ease. He begins each stanza literally and well, but soon wanders from his original, and supplies its place rather poorly. Professor Ten Brink, whose judgment is always to be respected, placed this poem as late as about 1374, a period when he thought Chaucer was unusually religious, but in the judgment of most critics it shows early work. The unsupported assertion of Speght, in the 1602 edition of Chaucer's works, that the prayer was translated by order of the Duchess Blanche, has been already mentioned.

§ 42. **The Exclamacion of the Dethe of Pite.**—In this beautiful little poem Chaucer tells us that he had intended to complain to Pity against the cruelty of Love who persecuted him for his truth. But when he ran to Pity he found her dead—although no man knew this but he—and standing about her herse were all the qualities which release men from the need of compassion, Beauty, Jollity, Assured Manner, Youth and their fellows, confederates in cruelty, from whom he fled. So the Complaint is never made to Pity, but he tells us the "effect" or substance of it in nine more stanzas, which bring the poem to a close. Professor Skeat supposes the idea of the personification of Pity and one or two phrases to have been taken from the ninth book of the *Thebais* of Statius. The personification of her adversaries certainly recalls the first part of the *Roman de la Rose*. But Chaucer's poem is quite independent of both works, and, especially in the eight verses which preface the Complaint, is singularly beautiful. The Complaint is not so well managed, and has sometimes been misunderstood, owing to Pity being partly confused with the lady to win whom her aid is sought. The different dates assigned to this poem have been mentioned in § 40, and the attempt to interpret it biographically in § 8. The two questions hang together, and neither can be answered with any certainty.

§ 43. **The Romaunt of the Rose.**—An outline of both the parts of the French original of Chaucer's translation has been given in §§ 28, 29, and we shall have to consider the authorship of the extant version at some length (§ 86). In our present uncertainty as to whether we do or do not possess the whole or any part of Chaucer's translation, it is useless to enter further than has been already done into the question of the date when it was made.

§ 44. **Dethe of Blaunche the Duchesse**, 1369.—In the prologue to this poem Chaucer feigns that in default of sleep, of which by a "sickness" he has "suffred this eight year" he is bereft, he reads the story of Ceyx and Alcione, where the drowned king is sent by Juno in a dreaṁ to his faithful wife. A vow to Juno and Morpheus lulls the poet into a deep sleep, in which he sees the dream which forms his real subject. He dreams that he is wakened one May morning by the song of birds. The windows of his room are painted with the stories of Troy, and the walls with the Romaunt of the Rose. He hears horns, takes horse, and finds the Emperor Octavian is hunting. He strays by himself and at last is ware of a man in black, a fair knight of four-and-twenty years,[1] seated under an oak lamenting. He asks him of his sorrow (for to teli a trouble eases the heart), and the knight complains of Fortune who has played with him as at chess with false pieces and stolen his "fers" or "queen." Since he has had understanding he has been Love's tributary, and one day it happened to him to come into a company of fair ladies and there to see the fairest of all, the "*goode faire White*," so by translation he calls her, whose beauty and goodness he describes at great length. On her all his love was laid, to see her in the morn healed his sorrows for all the day, and for perplexity how to tell his love his heart almost "brast a-tweyn." When he spoke he was answered "Nay," but another year's waiting brought its reward, and we have this lovely picture of the chivalrous ideal of marriage :—

> For trewely that sweté wyght
> Whan I had wrong and she the ryght,

[1] At the time of his wife's death John of Gaunt was twenty-nine. It has been suggested that a copyist may have mistaken xxix. for xxiv.

She wolde alway so goodély
Forgeve me so debonairely!
In al my youthe, in allé chaunce
She took me in hir governaunce.
Therwyth she was alway so trewe
Our joye was ever y-lychè newe,
Our hertes were so evene a payre
That never was that oon contrayre
To that other, for no wo;
For sothe y-liche they suffred tho
Oo blysse, and eke oo sorwe bothe;
Y-lyche they were bothe glad and wrothe,
Al was as oon withoutè were.
And thus we lyved ful many a yeere,
So wel, I kan nat tellè how.

With some unnecessary questioning it is made clear that it is for the loss of this peerless wife that the knight laments. "Is that your losse? By God, it is routhe," is the comment, and then the King (as the "Emperor Octavian," *i.e.* Edward III., is now called) is seen returning from the hunt to his "long castle with walles whyte" (Windsor?), and as a bell strikes noon the poet awakes and determines by a "process of time" to put his dream into verse.

The *Dethe of Blaunche* is not, as a French critic rashly asserted, a "mere servile imitation of Machault." The incident of Ceyx and Alcione is taken direct from Ovid, though Chaucer had probably also seen the *Dit de la Fontaine Amoureuse* in which Machault imitated the same passage. To Machault's *Remède de Fortune* and to the *Roman de la Rose* Chaucer is certainly under obligations, though not very great ones. But while his poem is original in substance, it cannot be called original in form. The dream, the May morning, the fair park full of singing-birds, all these are from the French, and the poem shares also the discursiveness of its models. Isolated passages in it are fine, but it is hardly fine as a whole.

Even the justly praised portrait of the knight's lady is rather an assemblage of fair qualities than a real character.

In § 8 something has already been said as to the poet's reference to his own eight-years' "sickness" in the opening lines, and we need not allude to it further here.

§ 45. **The Lyf of Seint Cecyle (Second Nun's Tale).**—We have had already to allude to this tale several times (§§ 38, 39), and have noted its mention in the Prologue to the *Legende of Good Women*, and subsequent appearance in the Canterbury Pilgrimage as the tale of the Second Nun, who is made to narrate it without any alteration of the allusions (i.) to the teller as a "son" instead of a daughter "of Eve," and (ii.) to the story having been written for readers instead of spoken to an audience. In the *Canterbury Tales* also it is preceded by no conversation between the host and the nun, and this is another sign that it was never finally revised for its present position. Instead of this talk we have a prologue on the sin of idleness, the suggestion (not the phrasing) of which Chaucer seems to have taken from a similar prologue to Jehan de Vignay's French translation of the *Legenda Aurea*, though in the tale itself he follows the original Latin and not the French version. This prologue leads up to an Invocation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, about a fourth of which imitates closely part of the first twenty-one lines of Dante's *Paradiso*, cant. xxxiii., or, as has also been suggested, "their original in some Latin prayer or hymn." The tale is further prefaced, as in the *Legenda*, by an attempted "interpretation of the name Cecilia," on the basis of various impossible etymologies. Thenceforward it is uninterrupted, and we read of Cecilia's conversion of her husband Valerian by aid of a miracle, of the

effect of her constancy on her persecutors, of the boiling bath heated day and night for ten days and yet cool to her, and finally of the three sword-strokes on her neck, which nevertheless allowed her to live and comfort her fellow-Christians for three days. It is expressly mentioned that "whan toold was al the lyf of Seinte Cecile," the pilgrims were nearing Boughton-under-Blee, so that there can be no doubt that Chaucer intended to give it a place among the *Tales*, without however finally revising it for this purpose. But though the *Lyf* was never thus finally revised, and though the Prologue and Invocation and the story itself are all written in the same seven-lined stanza, it is not certain that they were all written at the same time. The tale, despite some judicious omissions on Chaucer's part, is rather poorly told, whereas the verse of the Prologue and Invocation is strong and free, and it is at least possible that it represents a later addition made some time before 1385. If this view be accepted, we shall date the *Lyf* itself as early as we can, *i.e.* about 1370; otherwise it must be placed soon after Chaucer's first visit to Italy, in 1373 or 1374.

§ 46. **The Story of Grisilde (Clerk's Tale).**—In the story of Grisilde Chaucer tells us how an Italian marquis chose one of his subjects, a good and beautiful peasant girl, for his wife, first making her promise to obey him in all things. In her new life she bore herself with such wisdom and sweet dignity that all men praised her; but a strange passion seized the marquis to test to the uttermost her promised obedience. He pretended that his people scorned to be ruled over by the children of a peasant, and caused her to give up first her baby daughter and then her little son, as if to be killed. Then he sent her away, saying he would take another wife, and one

day bade her return to make ready the palace for the new marchioness. When the bride arrived he asked Grisilde what she thought of her, and Grisilde praised her kindly, but besought one thing:—

> That ye ne prikké with no tórmentinge
> This tendré mayden, as ye han doon mo.[1]

And this was the nearest word to a reproach she ever uttered. The pretended bride turns out to be her own daughter, the bride's brother her son, and with words of praise Grisilde is welcomed once more to her old position, which she meekly accepts. If we keep our eyes fixed on utter and unrepining obedience as the one quality which Grisilde had to exemplify, we shall find the story full of tender beauty. If we judge it as we should a modern story, it becomes hateful and impossible, as some people found the Italian version even in Chaucer's day. This Italian version was made by Boccaccio and recited to his friend Petrarch, who had heard the story many years before, and was now moved to write it down in Latin, keeping to Boccaccio's incidents, but moralising and amplifying his narrative. Chaucer's poem, for the most part, follows Petrarch very closely, though he adds a few vivid touches of his own, and expands some of the pathetic parts very considerably. When he came to use it as one of the *Canterbury Tales* he assigned it to the Clerk of Oxenford, and makes him say distinctly that he learnt it at Padua of a worthy clerk, "Fraunceys Petrark, the laureat poete." Now Petrarch's letter to Boccaccio, which follows on this story, is dated in some, though not in all copies, 8th June 1373, and before the end of the next year the poet was dead. In the summer of 1373 Chaucer was in the north of Italy; and if

[1] *Mo*, more, others.

he visited Petrarch at his residence at Arqua, near Padua, we can understand how he became possessed of a manuscript of the tale, while it is not very easy to imagine how else it is likely to have fallen in his way. So that on the whole it is best to believe that what he wrote of his Clerk of Oxenford he meant to be taken of himself, and that he actually did visit Petrarch and heard from him the story of Grisilde. If so, we shall not be far wrong in placing the date of Chaucer's version about the year 1374, *i.e.* very soon after his return from his first mission to Italy. By the time he wrote it he had gained considerable ease in the use of the seven-line stanza, and his translation (though he sometimes makes mistakes) is often as close to his original as if he were writing in prose. When he revised the poem for insertion in the *Canterbury Tales* he tacked on two stanzas and an envoy of thirty-six lines (rhyming throughout *ababcb*), in which he satirised all "arche-wyves," and it was probably at this time also that he inserted two stanzas (ll. 995-1008), beginning—

O stormy peple! unsad and ever untrewe!

in which he scorns the fickleness of the mob. In 1374 his views both of women and of mobs were as yet unembittered.

§ 47. **Story of Constance (Man of Law's Tale).**—The story of Constance illustrates the Christian virtue of Fortitude as that of Grisilde the Christian virtue of Obedience; and by the modern reader it must be read with the same mindfulness of the standpoint from which it was written. Daughter of an Emperor of Rome, Constance is given in marriage to a Soldan as a condition of his conversion. By the wickedness of his mother the Soldan is killed and Constance thrust out to sea in a little boat. By

a miracle she is preserved for three years, and at last reaches the coast of Britain, and there converts the "Constable" of the place where she lands, and finally the King, Alla, who marries her. But Alla's mother, during his absence, procures that she shall once more be sent to sea in her open boat, this time with her babe in her arms, and after another five years' voyage she is picked up by a Roman vessel and eventually restored to both her father and her husband. There are many blots in the story: the monotony of the parts played by the two mothers-in-law—one in Syria, the other in Northumberland—the unreasoning prodigality of time, and the refusal of Constance to declare who she is, being the most obvious. Chaucer had not so good material to work on as in the tale of Grisilde, and he had not yet learnt to reconstruct a story for himself, or to clothe his characters in flesh and blood. His authority was the Anglo-French chronicle of Nicholas Trivet, a Dominican friar, educated in London, Oxford, and Paris, who wrote nearly a score of commentaries and expositions on authors popular in the Middle Ages, and annals and chronicles both of the world before Christ and of his own time. He died probably soon after 1334. Chaucer took his facts from Trivet, though he deliberately alters them in one or two small points; but he uses his own language, abridges freely, and while he takes something under 700 lines from his author, he adds about 350 of his own. These 350 lines are all by way of poetic embellishments, exclamations, moralisings, and descriptions, and they show that Chaucer was becoming increasingly conscious both of his own powers and of what was required by his art. The added lines constitute the very salt of the poem, including as they do the mother's beautiful words of pity to her innocent babe

and the two notable speeches of the Soldaness to her friends. We should note also the stanzas on the influence of the stars (ll. 190-203, 295-315), and the first appearance of Chaucer's humour in such phrases as

> Housbondes been allé good and han been yoore
> That knowen wyves, I dar say yow na moore.

And the

> Coold water shall nat greeve us but a lite,

of the Soldaness's reference to Holy Baptism.

In § 37 we have already noted the appearance in different places in this poem of altogether seven and a half stanzas derived from the treatise *De Miseria Conditionis Humanae* of Pope Innocent III. Whether any of these additions to Trivet's story were made by Chaucer subsequently to the first draft of his poem it is impossible to say; but the poet's obvious desire to improve his original, and the free movement of his stanzas, are in rather striking contrast to the poverty of his plot and characters, and make it difficult to guess about what year the story could have been written. Its ascription in the *Canterbury Tales* to the Man of Law has no appropriateness, and this confirms our opinion that it was not originally written for him. But if we are right in assigning it to the period before 1380, we must assign it to as late in that period as possible.

§ 48. **Twelve "Tragedies" in the Monk's Tale.**—A difficulty similar to that expressed in the last paragraph meets us when we try to fix a date for twelve of the seventeen "tragedies" or stories of the misfortunes of great men and women, which are assigned to the Monk in the *Canterbury Tales*. Four of these tragedies deal with modern subjects, the rest with ancient; and as the four hang together, and one of

them celebrates the death of Bernabo Visconti, Lord of Milan, in 1385, we may be sure that these were written when the scheme of the *Canterbury Tales* was already conceived. The same may be said of the last story, that of Croesus, which obviously leads up to the rebuke with which the Monk is "stinted" of his tale. The remaining twelve tragedies tell the stories of Lucifer, Adam, Samson, Hercules, Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Zenobia, Nero, Holofernes, Antiochus, Alexander, and Julius Caesar, in an order in which chronological sequence is only disturbed by a little appropriate pairing, and by Nero and Zenobia being taken out of their right positions in order the better to cover the insertion of the four stories of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries which are placed between them. One of the modern stories, that of Ugolino of Pisa, is partly taken from Dante, and is strikingly better than all the rest. In the early stories, though the verse is good enough, the treatment is often careless and unsympathetic, and Chaucer was clearly not interested in them. It cannot be said dogmatically that they show early work, but it seems probable that at some time towards the close of the period with which we are now dealing (1369-1379) Chaucer began a poem on the same plan afterwards adopted by his follower Lydgate for his *Falls of Princes*, and then abandoned it, till the need came to suit the Monk with an unexpected but appropriate theme. The Bible, Boccaccio's *De Casibus Virorum et Feminarum Illustrium* and *De Claris Mulieribus*, Boethius and the *Roman de la Rose*, furnished the materials for these twelve tales, and they give us practically no help towards dating them. But if Chaucer wrote all seventeen tragedies about 1386 it is hard to believe that he would not have made something better out of them,

or, if the "stinting" of the Monk was in his view from the first, would not have brought this about more amusingly. As it is, he seems first to have tried to better his old work by adding to it, and then to have given up the attempt in despair, and turned his own failure into ridicule. But the point as to the one or two dates of composition cannot be decided, and its importance is diminished by the poverty of most of the poem. The metre is the same eight-line stanza used in the *A B C*.

§ 49. **The Compleynt of Mars.**—The *Compleynt of Mars* is founded on the old mythological story, told by Ovid in *Metam.* iv. 170-189, of the love of the god Mars for the goddess Venus, and its discovery by Phœbus Apollo. This story Chaucer here works out, according to the astronomy of the day, of a conjunction of the planet Mars with the planet Venus in the sign of Taurus or the Bull, one of the two astrological "houses" of Venus, into which Phœbus, or the Sun, enters every year on 12th April. If we may trust two notes of the copyist Shirley in a MS. in Trinity College, Cambridge, this astrological myth is also an allegory made "at the commandment of the renowned and excellent prince my lord the Duke John of Lancaster," and "as some men say . . . by [*i.e.* concerning] my lady of York, daughter to the King of Spain, and my lord of Huntingdon, sometime Duke of Exeter." We must note that Shirley makes his statement only as a piece of gossip, and no other confirmation has been found for it than (i.) a hint by the chronicler-monk Walsingham that the Lady Isabella had not always led a good life, and (ii.) an ingenious supposition of Professor Skeat's that three stanzas in the poem which treat of the "Brooch of Thebes" may contain a punning allusion to a tablet of jasper, which we know from her will that

Isabella was given by the King of Armenia. The first owner of the Theban brooch, which all men desired and none obtained save to their undoing, was Harmonia, daughter of Mars and Venus, and it only received the name of the "Brooch of Thebes" from the special mischief it wrought that city. Harmonia and Armenia would both in Middle English be written "Armonye," and a far-fetched pun, quite in keeping with the poem, is thus at least possible. Even thus strengthened, Shirley's bit of gossip does not command very great respect, for a poem on such a subject was sure in any case to find malevolent interpreters, and the poet's interest is so plainly in the stars that it is difficult to accept the theory that the whole poem is an unpleasant allegory. If we reject Shirley's gossip we may revive Dr. Koch's arguments, noticed in § 38, and imagine that in 1379, when Mars, Venus, and the Sun were nearly, though not quite, in the positions described, Chaucer may have been reminded of Ovid's story, and have written this curious medley of astronomy and mythology, without any court intrigue or unbrotherly suggestion of John of Gaunt's to spur him on. The point cannot be settled, and is not one to linger over.

The first 154 lines of the poem are written in seven-line stanzas, and, as we are told in ll. 13, 14, are supposed to be spoken by a bird before sunrise on St. Valentine's Day. Beginning with a little song, he tells the story of Mars and Venus and of the comforting of Venus by Mercury, setting forth every detail with minute astronomical accuracy, even to such a precise but ungallant observation as that Venus hurried to meet Mars twice as fast as he to her. Then we have the "Compleynt of Mars" from which the poem takes its name. This consists of a

prosaic prelude, followed by fifteen stanzas divided by their subjects into five sections of three stanzas each. The themes of the several sections are as follows:—(i.) The lover's devotion; (ii.) His lady is sick at heart; (iii.) Love brings woe oftener than the moon changes; (iv.) It is like the "Brooch of Thebes," ever desired, ever bringing sorrow on its possessor; (v.) All knights, ladies, and lovers should sympathise with Mars. Without doubt the poem is very clever and ingenious, but it is not one of Chaucer's masterpieces; nor, if Shirley's story be true, did it deserve to be. The incident of the "Brooch of Thebes" is found in Statius, *Thebais* ii. 265 *sqq.*, and it was probably there that Chaucer read about it.

§ 50. **Chaucer's late development.**—In this chapter we have considered only eight out of some fifty poems written by Chaucer. Of these eight poems the four usually printed among his Minor Works, *i.e.* the *A B C*, the *Dethe of Pite*, the *Dethe of the Duchesse*, and the *Compleynt of Mars*, contain altogether 1935 lines. The other four poems are taken from among the *Canterbury Tales*: one, the *Lyf of Seint Cecyle*, on Chaucer's own authority; another, the story of Grisilde, with strong probability; the third and fourth, the story of Constance and the twelve Tragedies from the Monk's Tale, rather doubtfully. These four excerpts from the *Canterbury Tales* give us another 3378 lines, or a grand total of 5313 lines to represent the whole of Chaucer's poetry in, roughly speaking, the first forty years of his life—so far as we now have it. The poems generally accepted as written by Chaucer contain altogether nearly 35,000 lines, so that we have the very uneven division of a little under 30,000 lines of verse, in addition to four prose works, written between forty and sixty, and only a little over 5000 lines of verse written up to the age of

forty—one-seventh of Chaucer's extant work written in the prime of life; sixth-sevenths in middle age!

A note at the beginning of this section has already reminded us of the loss of three translations by Chaucer probably made during this period. These and a fourth translation, that of the *Roman de la Rose*, if all were now extant, might conceivably bring the work of the two periods very nearly equal in point of quantity. It is reasonable to suppose that Chaucer began at the beginning of the *Roman* — many scholars believe that we have at least 1700 lines of his version of the first part still extant. We know from himself that he translated at least some of the second part, that continuation by Jean de Meung which Love reckoned as a heresy against his law. As we have seen (§§ 28, 29), there are about 22,000 lines in the two parts of the *Roman*, and if Chaucer ever had the patience to translate them all we need not wonder that he found leisure for very little other poetry. It is not at all likely that he had this patience, but the *Roman de la Rose*, together with the other calls on his time, may serve to explain to some extent why this period of his life appears to us so singularly unproductive. For Chaucer was busy in these days trying to make his fortune, and his poetry could not do much for him. Queen Philippa was dead, Edward III. in his dotage; there was only John of Gaunt to look to, and John of Gaunt, though he may have set Chaucer to write poetry, once, twice, or thrice, as critics choose to imagine, probably valued him more as a man of action than as a man of letters. It was by service in the King's court, on diplomatic missions, and at the Custom-House that a living had to be earned and a substantial position won; and it is to these objects, trivial in his case as we may now think them, that Chaucer appears to

have devoted the best years of his life. If we had only the quantity of his verse to judge by, we should hardly, in our uncertainty as to how much has been lost, be entitled to speak thus; but we have also the much more decisive test of quality. If Shakspere had died in his thirtieth year he would have been remembered as a botcher of a few poor plays, and the author of *Venus and Adonis*, the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Richard III.* Where Shakspere botched Chaucer translated, and the charm of a few hundred lines in the *Dethe of Blaunche* and the pathos of the stories of *Grisilde* and *Constance* are the chief titles to remembrance of all the work he did on the younger side of forty. From the very first he is distinguished from his contemporaries by the music of his verse; but the humour, the insight into character, the knowledge of life, the entire mastery of words, the essential qualities, that is, which we now connect with his name, all came to Chaucer exceptionally late.

CHAPTER V

POEMS OF CHAUCER'S SECOND PERIOD—CHAUCER AT WORK ON ITALIAN MODELS

§ 51. **Palamon and Arcyte** (*lost*).—In § 37 attention has already been called to the mention in Chaucer's list of his works in the *Legende of Good Women* of a story containing "al the love of Palamon and Arcyte." As then pointed out, the fragments of a fairly close translation of Boccaccio's *Teseide* which are at present dove-tailed into *Anelida and Arcyte*, the *Parlement of Foules*, and *Troilus*, have led many scholars to think that this *Palamon and Arcyte* is not the story told in heroic couplets in the *Knightes Tale*, but an

earlier version written in stanzas, and afterwards suppressed, odd verses being used up in the poems named. If this be so, the lost version of *Palamon and Arcyte* is necessarily earlier than any of the poems in which use is made of it, *i.e.* is necessarily earlier than 1382 (date of the *Parlement of Foules*) and probably one of the first poems which Chaucer wrote after he had become possessed of a copy of Boccaccio's *Teseide*, whenever that may have been.

§ 52. **Compleynt to his Lady.**—The 117 lines to which the title *A Compleynt to his Lady* has been assigned consist of four fragments in three different metres. In the Harleian MS. 78 (by Shirley), and in Stowe's edition of 1561 in which the lines were first printed (not from Shirley's copy), they are tacked on to the *Exclamacion of the Dethe of Pite*, which is, however, complete without them. The first fragment consists of two seven-line stanzas, the next of eight lines rhyming *a, zab, abc, b*, a metrical system which the seventeen lines which follow, rhyming *zab, abc, bcd, cde, def, ef* . . ., show to be the first of two attempts in Dante's *terza rima*. The fourth fragment consists of eight stanzas (the second imperfect), each of ten decasyllabic lines, rhyming *aab, aab, cd, dc*. In the first fragment the poet tells us how he cannot sleep "so desespeired I am from allé blisse"; in the second "the more I love the more she doth me smerte"; in the third he asks—

> Now hath not Lové me bestowed weel
> To lové, ther I never shal have part?

and complains

> I can but love her best, my swetė fo;
> Love hath me taught no more of his art
> But serve alwey, and stintė for no wo.

The last and longest fragment begins with a variation

of a lament which occurs also in the *Pite* (ll. 99-104) and *Parlement of Foules* (ll. 90, 91)—

> For al that thing which I desyre I mis,
> And al that ever I wolde not, i-wis
> That fynde I redy to me evermore.

And, after many protestations, ends with the cry that, if no truer servant can be found and the poet yet be suffered to die for no guilt save his goodwill, "as good were thanne untrewe as trewe to be."

A poem which consists only of a series of fragments is necessarily difficult to date. There are strong resemblances to the *Pite*, and Dr. Koch who dates that poem about 1373-74 naturally assigns this *Complaynt* to the same period. But the lines quoted above connect it equally with the *Parlement of Foules*, and there are some resemblances also to phrases in *Anelida and Arcyte*, and a common interest in metrical experiments. Even at the risk of having to assign a later date to the *Pite* than has yet been proposed, it seems best to place this *Complaynt* about the year 1380. There is no good reason for endeavouring to extract from it any biographical references.

§ 53. **Anelida and Arcyte.**—Like the *Complaynt to his Lady*, this poem is of great interest metrically. It consists of an Invocation and story in thirty seven-line stanzas, followed by a *Complaynt* very artfully constructed of fourteen stanzas arranged in a Prelude, two strophes or movements of six stanzas each, and a Conclusion. The prelude, conclusion, and first four stanzas of each strophe, are each of nine decasyllabic lines, rhyming *aab, aab, bab*. The fifth stanzas consist of two parts, each of eight lines, the fourth and eighth lines having ten syllables, the other lines only eight. The rhymes in the first part run *aaab aaab*, and in the second part the same

rhymes are taken up and reversed, *bbba bbba*. In the two last stanzas of the strophes a fresh variation is obtained by an internal rhyme on the fourth and eighth syllables being introduced into the nine-line stanza in which the greater part of the poem is written. Only the professed student of Chaucer's metres need concern himself with the exact details of these variations, but the general result from them is not unimportant. We have noted above how hampered by his metre Chaucer appears in his *A B C*, and we now find him delighting to dance in fetters, writing stanzas of sixteen lines with only two rhymes in them, and turning from these to introduce internal rhymes into a nine-line stanza already sufficiently complicated. One or two of the rhymes are not quite as sound as Chaucer's usually are, but there is no other sign of distress, and both his greater skill and his greater interest in metrical experiments deserve noting.

Turning from the form of *Anelida and Arcyte* to its subject we find that we have first an invocation to Mars and the Muse Polyhymnia, followed by a story as to the source of which Chaucer tells us, "First folow I Stace and after him Corinne." The reference to Statius is justified by a few lines taken from the *Thebais*. As to "Corinne" we are told that there was a Greek Corinna, and possibly a Greek Corinnus, writers of works, now lost, which Chaucer could certainly never have construed. The name of the one or the other seems to cover the stanzas here borrowed from Boccaccio's *Teseide*, just as in *Troilus and Cressida* the name Lollius seems to cover the use of Boccaccio's *Filostrato*—the reason of the mystery being in each case obscure. These four stanzas from the *Teseide* with which the poem opens describe the

entry of Theseus into Athens after his campaign in Scythia. We know from the *Knightes Tale*, in which Chaucer translated the same passage, sometimes in the same words, that Theseus was then met by ladies from Thebes complaining of the cruelty of Creon, its tyrant, in leaving unburied the bodies of their husbands slain in battle. In the *Knightes Tale* Theseus immediately rides off and defeats Creon, and captures both the Theban knight Arcyte and his friend Palamon. We can thus see the point to which Chaucer meant to work round, but in the present poem he leaves Theseus riding to Athens in l. 46, and though we have 300 more lines of the story extant we do not even approach an explanation of why Theseus is dragged in. These 300 lines are occupied by a description of Arcyte's faithless love for Anelida, and of his desertion of her for another lady, who treats him as harshly as he deserves. After this comes the *Compleynt*, written by Anelida with her own hand, and sent to her false knight. Following the *Compleynt* we have only one more stanza (not in all the MSS.), and then the poem breaks off. We may imagine that some hundreds of lines further on Theseus was meant to appear and avenge Anelida on the cruel Arcyte, but his introduction at the outset, so long before he is wanted, remains inartistic. It may be held probable that this was at least partly due to Chaucer's desire to use up the opening stanzas of his old *Palamon and Arcyte*, just as the reference to the Temple of Mars in the last verse of the poem gives us a hint that he was intending to use another passage from the *Teseide*, which afterwards appeared in the *Knightes Tale*. Professor Skeat has pointed out that a line in *Anelida and Arcyte* (237) is repeated from *A Compleynt to his Lady* (l. 50), and that there are other

resemblances between the two poems. Like the fragmentary *Compleynt*, the unfinished *Anelida* is difficult to date; but it seems probable that it represents Chaucer's first study of the *Teseide* before he turned to the *Filostrato*, and should thus be placed immediately before *Troilus and Cressida*, *i.e.* about 1380. It should be noted that for four-fifths of the poem as we have it, *i.e.* all the part which tells us of Anelida, no original has been found.

§ 54. Boece.—The *De Consolatione Philosophiae* is a treatise in five books, each book being divided into sections, written alternately in prose or verse. Its author was the Roman Senator Boethius, cruelly murdered in A.D. 525 by order of his master, the Emperor Theodoric. In his youth and early manhood Boethius had been a diligent student of Greek science and philosophy, and had translated and annotated some of the chief Greek treatises on mathematics, mechanics, music, logic, and theology. But in obedience to the theory laid down by Plato in his *Republic*, that public office is a burden which the good man, and especially the philosopher, should undertake for the advantage of the State, Boethius took part in politics, gained the favour of the Emperor, and was appointed Consul for the year A.D. 510. In A.D. 522 his influence was at its height, and against all precedent the Consulship was divided between his two sons, purely out of compliment to their illustrious father. Three years later Boethius ventured to protest against a tyrannical prosecution directed against a fellow-senator by the Emperor. He was hurried away from his luxurious palace and his beloved books and imprisoned at Pavia, where he was finally tortured to death. During his imprisonment he wrote his treatise on the Consolation of Philosophy, a work which though

now little read is still mentioned with respect for the beauty of its style, and throughout the Middle Ages was regarded as a storehouse of noble thought.

Boethius imagines himself visited in his imprisonment by his divine mistress, Philosophy, who listens to the story of his troubles and to his complaints against his unjust accusers, and then proceeds to apply her remedies. These are at first the "lighter medecines" afforded by such topics as the proverbial inconstancy of Fortune, the sufferer's past prosperity, and the blessings that still remain to him in the wellbeing of his wife and sons. Not riches, nor honour, nor power, nor fame, constitute true happiness, but this is found in obedience to the law of love which governs all things. Then Philosophy begins to apply her "severer" and "more pungent" remedies, and the deceitfulness of all the tests of happiness on which men rely is shown from a fresh standpoint. Hence we rise to the idea of God Himself as the Supreme Good, the rule and square of things desirable, the haven of rest, and pass on to consider the problems of the existence of evil, the rewards of virtue and vice, and the reconciliation of man's freewill with God's foreknowledge. All these points are really treated from the standpoint of the Stoics, but the Christianity of Boethius was taken for granted in the Middle Ages, and he was even credited with the composition of various treatises against heresy. The prose in which the arguments of Philosophy are expressed in the *De Consolatione* is diversified by a succession of short poems or "metres," in which similar lessons are taught, often by analogies drawn from the forces of nature. Chaucer's translation is wholly in prose, which seldom runs very fluently, and is at times obscure. But the task-work of this prose version left him profoundly influenced by Boethius,

and in many of the poems composed while he was at work on it, and in subsequent years, notably in *Troilus and Cressida*, the *Knightes Tale*, and the fine series of poems entitled the *Former Age*, *Fortune*, *Lak of Stedfastnesse*, *Gentilesse*, and *Truth*, we find paraphrases and expansions of ideas which occur in the *De Consolatione* and even, as in *Troilus*, Bk. v. ll. 963-1059 (the argument on Freewill), a close imitation of long passages.

The exceptional number of passages imitated from the *De Consolatione* in Chaucer's *Troilus and Cressida*, and the mention of the poem and the translation together in the *Lines to Adam Scrivener*, suggest that the two works were in hand about the same time. Probably the translation was slightly the earlier of the two, and it may even have been begun before the poet's second visit to Italy. We cannot date it more exactly than about 1380-82.

§ 55. **Troilus and Cressida.**—Chaucer's *Troilus and Cressida* is by a great deal the longest of his extant poems, and its length suggests an explanation of some points in its relations to the *Parlement of Foules* and *Hous of Fame* which have given rise to a little uncertainty. In the *Parlement* Troilus is mentioned among Love's heroes, and on the other hand the talk of a future "comedy" at the end of *Troilus and Cressida* shows that the *Hous of Fame* was already in Chaucer's head and was to be his next work. The *Parlement* has only 699 lines, and it is a fair conjecture that the longer poem was begun the earlier, laid aside for a few weeks in 1382 in favour of the *Parlement*, for which the call was pressing (see § 56), and finished in the following year.

The exact number of lines in the *Troilus* is 8246, and according to Mr. W. M. Rossetti's careful estimate 5663 of these are due to Chaucer alone (save in so far

that he took something over a hundred of them from Petrarch, Boethius, and Dante). The remaining 2583 lines are condensed from 2730 of Boccaccio's *Filostrato*, a poem which contains in all 5704. Disregarding figures, then, we may say that Chaucer rejected more than one-half of the poem from which he was borrowing, and added to what he took considerably more than twice as much of his own.

Cressida is ultimately the same person as the fair Briseis, the captive of Achilles, and the innocent occasion of his great wrath, which forms the subject of the *Iliad*. But in the Middle Ages Homer was but a name, and the first germ of the story of which she is now the faithless heroine seems to be found in the string of favourable epithets with which she is mentioned by Dares Phrygius (see § 26). To Benoît de Sainte Maur (see § 25) she owes her development. He first tells how her father Calchas, having left her behind when he deserted the Trojans, persuaded the Greeks to exchange the Trojan prince Antenor against her; how she was escorted to the Greek camp by Diomede, who wellnigh persuaded her to forget her earlier Trojan love, Troilus; how Troilus wounded Diomede almost to the death, and Briseida (so Benoît calls her) in pity for Diomede's wound at last gave herself wholly over to him. When Boccaccio took up the story he retold it from the side of Troilus, made Briseida—who is now called Griseida—a widow instead of a maid, and invented the character of her cousin, Pandarus, the bosom-friend of Troilus. To his poem, which is written like his *Teseide* in eight-line stanzas, he gave the name *Filostrato*, *i.e.* Philostratus, which he imagined to mean, not, as it does, lover of warfare, but "love-vanquished." Chaucer further altered the story in two ways: he made Pandarus an older man, the uncle, instead of the

cousin, of Cryseyde, and invested him with a great deal of humour and worldly wisdom. Cryseyde herself, at least during her stay in Troy, he raised and refined in every possible manner, so much so, indeed, that, as Mr. Rossetti rightly remarks, her subsequent treachery to Troilus becomes much less intelligible than it is in Boccaccio.

Despite occasional prolixity and a few artistic flaws *Troilus and Cressida* is perhaps the most beautiful poem of its kind in the English language. Yet Chaucer, speaking in his own person as a Christian man, in three stanzas of very great beauty condemns the theory of life and love that underlies it. This theory is that of most of the romances of chivalry, and we may catch a glimpse of it by remembering the story of Grisilde, and, again, Chaucer's phrase, "the seintes legendes of Cupide" (*i.e.* the Legends of Cupid's Saints), for his stories of the women who have died for love. If Patience could be so isolated from all other virtues as to make it praiseworthy in Grisilde to consent to the murder of her children, it is small wonder that Love also was erected into a religion with its own code of morality. We shall be mistaken, indeed, if we think that this code was either an easy or a base one. To be a good lover a knight had to be brave unto death, courteous to all men, humble to his lady, pure of thought, modest of speech, ready to sacrifice all, even his love itself, for his lady's honour. Whom he loved was reckoned a matter of destiny, and this was held to excuse all. The attractions of such a theory are not dead yet, but it ignores some of the elementary facts of human nature, and while the World smiles cynically at its impracticability the Church has never wavered in its strenuous condemnation. In taking farewell of their readers Boccaccio is the spokesman

of the World, Chaucer of Religion: "O yonge fresshe folkes," he writes:—

> O yongė fresshė folkės, he or she,
> In which that love up groweth with youre age,
> Repeireth hom fro worldly vanyte,
> And of youre herte up casteth the visage
> To thilkė God, that after his ymage
> Yow made, and thynketh al nys but a faire,
> This worlde that passeth soon, as flourės faire.
> And loveth Hym the which that right for love,
> Upon a crois, our soulės for to beye,
> First starfe and roos, and sitt in heven above,
> For he nyl falsen no wight, dar I seye,
> That wol his herte alle holly on hym leye;
> And syn he best to love is, and most meke
> What nedeth feynėd lovės for to seke?

Late in his life Chaucer is said to have repented that he ever wrote this story; that he ever wrote anything, in fact, save lives of the saints and prose treatises of philosophy. Few sane people will share this view. *Troilus and Cressida* is not good for all men to read, nor for any man at the wrong age or season, but it is written by a great poet who knew the troubles and mysteries of life, and thought about them while he was writing it; and no poem so written, in the sum of its influence, can be otherwise than good.

Only a detailed study of the *Filostrato* reveals by how much Chaucer has ennobled the characters both of hero and heroine. In his hands Troilus becomes a type of faithful self-sacrificing love according to the ideal of chivalry; Cressida, the sweetest, most piteous of unfaithful women, so that he writes of her himself:—

> Ne me ne list this sely womman chyde
> Ferther than this storiė wol devyse;
> Hire name, allas! is pubblyshėd so wyde,
> That for hire gilte it ought ynough suffise;
> And if I might excuse hire any wyse,
> For she so sory was for hire untrouthe,
> I-wis I wold excuse hire yet for routhe.

To ennoble the others the character of Pandarus is deepened and worsened. He is no longer a passionate youth, but a man of the world, using at times the language of "Cupid's Saints," but knowing exactly what he is about in helping his friend. His humour is endless, but it is not always pleasant, and he is only saved by his capacity for friendship.

Of the beauty of special passages in the poem it is impossible here to speak. Mr. T. H. Ward has quoted some of the best in his *English Poets* (vol. i.), and these should be read.

§ 56. **Lines to Adam Scrivener and To Rosemounde.**—As mentioned above, the *Troilus* is joined to the *Boece* not only by the large number of quotations from the *De Consolatione* in the former work, but also by the little seven-line poem entitled *Chaucer's Wordes unto his owne Scrivener.* This is so short and gives so vivid a picture of the ill-treatment authors received from their scribes that it may be quoted in full, despite the unpleasant humour of the third line. "Adam Scriveyn," it runs:—

> Adam Scriveyn, if ever it thee befalle
> Boece or Troylus for to writè newe,
> Under thy lockès maist thou have the scalle,
> But after my making thou writè trewe:
> So oft a day I mote thy werke renewe,
> It to correct and eke to rubbe and scrape,
> And all is thurgh thy negligence and rape.[1]

The date of this little poem is probably about 1383.

To about the same time we may also ascribe the charming little poem *To Rosemounde*, seen by Dr. Furnivall at the Bodleian some years ago, and first published by Professor Skeat in 1891. This is a ballade in three eight-line stanzas, with the refrain, "Thogh ye to me ne do no daliaunce." The poet asserts that he is as deep sunk in love as ever a cook

[1] *rape*, hurry.

smothered a fish in sauce, a simile from which we may very fairly gather that, however much he may have delighted to see the pretty Rosemounde dance, his love for her did not greatly disturb his peace of mind.

§ 57. **The Parlement of Foules.**—The *Parlement of Foules* is one of Chaucer's earliest masterpieces. He had translated from French, Latin, and Italian, and we can trace his progress by the increasing freedom with which he used his originals. In this poem also we find abundant traces of his reading. We have a summary of *Scipio's Dream* from Cicero; there are reminiscences of a few lines of Dante; there is a list of trees taken partly from the *Teseide*, partly from the *Roman de la Rose*; Chaucer takes also from the *Teseide* (Bk. vii. st. 51-66) no less than sixteen stanzas (ll. 183-294) describing the Garden of Love (perhaps already translated for *Palamon and Arcyte*), and he imitates from the *Planctus Naturae* of Alain de l'Isle (see § 25) his description of Nature and her birds, though he is wise enough to represent the birds as living creatures clustering round her instead of mere embroidery to her garment. He was writing a poem which needed ornament, and he took his ornament from where he could find it; but the spirit, the gaiety, humour, and love of nature are all his own, and regarded as a whole the *Parlement of Foules* is as original as the *Midsummer Night's Dream* or *As You Like It*.

The prelude to the poem opens with a tribute to the "wonderful working of Love," of whom the writer professes to know nought save what he reads in books. For pleasure or learning he reads oft, and lately spent a whole day over Cicero's account of the dream of Scipio, and the explanations of man's duty and destiny given by the great Africanus.

The wery hunter, slepynge in his bed,
To wode agen his mynde goth anon;
The jugé dremyth how his pleis been sped;
The carter dremyth how his carte is gon;
The riche of gold; the knyght fyght[1] with his fon[2];
The syké[3] met[4] he drynkyth of the tonne;
The lovere met he hath his lady wonne.

He had read *Scipio's Dream* before, but this time it set him dreaming himself, and the great Africanus appeared to lead him to a park "walled with grene stone," over whose double gate were inscriptions in gold and black, of invitation and of warning. This writing, he is told, is for Love's servants, not for him—

For thou of love hast lost thy taste, I gesse,
As seek[5] man hath of swete and bitternesse.

He surveys the beautiful garden and the temple of Venus, and comes at last to a lawn upon a hill where the goddess Nature is seated in leafy state, surrounded by birds of every kind, for this is St. Valentine's Day, on which every bird has to choose his mate. Six stanzas are filled with a list of the birds, and then the poet comes to his "point." "Nature, the vicaire of the almighty lorde" (the phrase is from Alain de l'Isle), proclaims that every bird is now to make his choice: the tercel[6] eagles, who are "fowls royal," first; then the others after their degree. The first tercel makes suit, with many vows of true service, to the fair formel eagle whom Nature holds on her hand, and two other tercels pray likewise for her favour. Nature bids the other fowls pronounce which of the three is worthiest, and the goose, the turtle-dove, the cuckoo, speak on behalf of their several orders, amid many comments and interruptions. Nature bids the

[1] *fyght*, fighteth. [2] *fon*, foes. [3] *syke*, sick.
[4] *met*, dreams. [5] *seek*, sick.
[6] Among birds of prey the females were called *formels*, the males *tercels*, because they were supposed to be a third smaller. The derivation of *formel* is uncertain.

formel speak for herself, and having professed her loyalty she answers with a request for a respite till "this yeer be doon," and after that "to have her choice all free." The boon is granted; the other birds choose their mates; and with a roundel on the theme—

> Now welcom somer, with thy sonnė softe
> That hath this wintrės weders over-shake,
> And driven awey the longė nightės blake—

the *Parlement* ends.

That this charming poem had an allegorical reference was long ago seen, and several wild guesses were made as to the marriage for which it was written before Dr. Koch hit on the right solution. By quotations from the *Life* of the Emperor Wenceslas, and from Froissart's *Chronicles*, it has been decisively shown that the formel eagle is Anne of Bohemia, who, after having been contracted first to a Prince of Bavaria and afterwards to a Margrave of Misnia (the two tercels "of lower kind"), became the queen of the royal eagle, Richard II. In the *Life* of Wenceslas we are told that the English ambassadors arrived at the court of Bohemia about January 1381 (they left London 26th December 1380); and special mention is made of the fact that "the Princess Anne had already reached the age to choose herself a husband" (*cf.* ll. 626, 627). The marriage took place 14th January 1382, almost exactly when the year was "doon" (l. 647), and for the reasons already quoted from Dr. Koch (§ 38, 2) it seems certain that Chaucer was bidden to celebrate the courtship early in the following summer. Royal marriages were too likely to be broken off for poets to hymn them prematurely, and it is possible that the Queen, to whom Chaucer speaks of presenting his *Legende of Good Women*, and who took an immediate interest in

English affairs, may herself have bidden him write this poem in her honour.

§ 58. **The Hous of Fame.**—It is not a little remarkable that both the *Hous of Fame* and the *Legende of Good Women*, the two poems, that is, which immediately preceded the great series of the *Canterbury Tales*, were left unfinished. It seems as if Chaucer was casting about for some new method of expression which should exactly suit him, and was unable to satisfy himself in either of these poems, which yet contain much admirable work. The *Hous of Fame*, with which we are first concerned, though rather badly planned, is quite perfect in its several parts, and the pains which Chaucer bestowed on it are shown in the variety of sources on which he drew in building it up. The machinery of the poem involves the common mediæval fiction of a dream, which is said to have befallen the writer on 10th December in an unspecified year, probably 1383 (see § 38, 3). Chaucer's dream first takes him to a temple of glass dedicated to Venus, in which on a tablet he sees written the opening words of Virgil's *Aeneid*, followed by the whole story, which he gives in epitome in 317 lines. On leaving the temple he finds himself in a sandy plain, and sees a great golden eagle beginning to alight (end of Bk. i.). As he gazes at the eagle it seizes and bears him aloft, telling him not to be afraid, for it is sent from Jove, in compassion for the poet's dull and loveless life, to show him the Hous of Fame, where he shall find some game and desport. Where Fame dwells "thyn owne book it telleth," the eagle says, alluding to the description of the Palace of Fame in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, xii. 33-63, on which Chaucer founds all the details of his own account. The eagle explains how the sounds of earth are borne aloft to Fame's House; and as

they fly through space offers to teach him about the stars, an offer declined by the poet on the ground that he is too old to learn. They reach the hill on which the palace stands, and the eagle bids Chaucer go in, while it awaits him outside (end of Bk. ii.). Fame's House is built on a great rock of ice, inscribed with names which melt away in the sun. The house itself beggars description. The goddess sits on a throne of ruby in a mighty hall set around with pillars on which stand the great writers of past time. Suppliants approach, and Fame sends for the wind-god Aeolus, who comes bearing his golden and black trumps, the one of Fame, the other of Slander. The various requests of inner bands of suppliants are granted, refused, or reversed at the mere whim of the goddess; and when a bystander asks Chaucer what he is doing there, he answers that he seeks no fame for himself, and is disappointed in his hope of gathering new tidings. He hints, in fact, that though he is very interested in seeing exactly how everything is done, he knew well enough before he came both what men asked of the goddess and how she answered them. He leaves the hall, and by the help of the eagle finds himself in a house sixty miles long, filled with all the gossip of the world, represented in the likeness of its speakers—shipmen, pilgrims, and pardoners being especially prominent. At the last he sees a man who seems to be of great authority; and there the poem breaks off. What we have of it consists altogether of 2158 lines, of which the first and second books each occupy, roughly speaking, a quarter, and the last, though unfinished, the remaining half. This inequality of division is in itself rather a blot, and is made the more remarkable by the apparent irrelevancy of the first book, which is mainly taken up by an epitome of the *Aeneid*. We

cannot, indeed, help remarking that Chaucer, having been upborne to Fame's dominions by his golden eagle, finds it rather hard to get down again, and that the incompleteness of this "comedy" is probably due to his inability to find a striking climax to it. As has already been noted, the workmanship of the separate parts of the poem is much more masterly than the general plan, and the poet's individuality is exceptionally strongly marked. Indeed, in the conversation with the eagle, some lines from which have been quoted in § 20, he tells us more about himself than in any other of his poems.

The likeness of the *Hous of Fame* to Dante's *Divina Commedia* may not at first sight be very apparent, yet there can be no doubt that this is the "som comedye" which, at the end of his *Troilus*, Chaucer prayed that God would send him might to make, and that its idea was largely built up on the lines of Dante's great work, the influence of which is seen in a number of particular passages. Both poems are in three books, both are visions, and in both the poet is conducted by a heaven-sent guide, who yet may not go everywhere with him. The idea of the golden eagle is taken from Dante (*Purgat.* ix.), so too is the specifying of the exact day of the vision. It is probable also that the part played by Virgil in the *Divina Commedia* suggested the epitome of the *Aeneid* already mentioned. In the *Hous of Fame* each book is preceded by an invocation, the second being suggested by the *Inferno*, ii. 7-9, and the third by one in a similar position in Dante's third book (*Parad.* i. 13-27). Minor imitations are too numerous to be here quoted. But it is not only from Dante that Chaucer borrowed. As he is upborne through the clouds he remarks :—

> And tho thought I upon Boece,
> That wryteth, Thought may flee so hye,
> With fetheres of philosophye,
> To passen everych element:
> And whan he hath so fer y-went,
> Than may he seen, behynde his bak,
> Cloud and al that I of spak.

Chaucer's eagle is a much less formidable person than the Philosophy of the *De Consolatione*, but there is a philosophical side to his poem, and this is taken rather from the early chapters of Boethius than from Dante, whose seriousness was too deep for Chaucer's humour. We can, indeed, almost watch the poet at work: He is minded to write a "comedy" on the model of Dante, only in a lighter vein, chooses an ethical theme instead of a religious one, and bethinks him of the notable description of Fame in Virgil, *Aen.* iv. 173-189, and of her palace in the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid. With the aid of a little disquisition on dreams from his favourite Macrobius, he twists these different strands into a very original poem, and then puts it on one side till he can think of an effective ending, which never occurs to him. He chooses for his metre what he calls a "light and lewed" (*i.e.* vulgar) rhyme, the octosyllabic couplet, disclaims all pretensions to "art poetical," and only prays that it may be made "sumwhat agreable." Throughout the poem he adopts the tone of a shrewd and humorous spectator rather than that of the neophyte awed by the mysteries into which he is being initiated. No less than Dante he throws his individuality into his poem, and the difference of the results is typical of the difference of the men. But despite the free rein which Chaucer thus allows himself, the subject of his poem remained too abstract to please him. It led up to nothing more than a description, and the platitudes that the decrees of

Fame are capricious, and that Rumour exaggerates and distorts. Chaucer used his humour, his imagination, and his learning to enrich this poor theme, but he could not round off the poem to his liking. The old forms which he had used so successfully for the sportive *Parlement of Foules* failed him in his more ambitious attempt, and he may have received his first hint that the proper subjects of his poetry were, not mythological abstractions, but the men and women he saw around him.

§ 59. **The Legende of Good Women.**—The *Legende of Good Women*, as Chaucer planned it, was intended to consist of a prologue, the stories of nineteen women who have been true to love, and lastly the legend of the crown of womanhood, Queen Alcestis, who gave up her own life to save her husband's. Such a series of poems had plainly been for some time in Chaucer's mind. The goodness of Alceste is the subject of two stanzas in the *Troilus*; and in the *Hous of Fame* (Bk. i. ll. 388-426), after telling the story of Dido out of Virgil's *Aeneid*, he gives quite a list of other faithful women, to whom, doubtless, he meant to apply the phrase he uses of Dido, that if it were not too long to endite he would have liked to have written her love in full. As we have seen, the *Hous of Fame* probably represents Chaucer's poetical work during 1384, and the *Legende*, in which it is mentioned first in the poet's list of his own writings (see § 37), must have immediately succeeded it. We know that on 17th February 1385 he obtained permission to exercise his Comptrollership by deputy (§ 15), and it has been conjectured that the intention he expresses of sending this new poem to the Queen (ll. 496, 497), and the probability that she was meant to be identified with the good Alceste, are marks of gratitude for this particular favour, which may have

been obtained through Anne's intercession. Lydgate, in the prologue to his *Fall of Princes* (see § 35), even says that the *Legende* was written "at the request of the quene," but if so it would surely have been duly completed. Everything, however, points to 1385 as the year of its composition.

We have already had to quote for other purposes two passages which strike the keynote of the prologue. Chaucer tells us of his reverence for the authority of books, and how only his love of flowers in May, and especial worship of the daisy, can tear him from them (§ 20). One May Day he goes to sleep in a leafy bower, and dreams that Love threatens him for his heresies, that he is forgiven on the intercession of Love's Queen, Alcestis (§ 37), and bidden to write twenty legends of good women as an easy penance. The legends actually written are nine in number, celebrating (1) Cleopatra, who is represented (not quite in accordance, as Chaucer imagines, with "storial sooth") as a martyr to her love for Antony; (2) Thisbe, who refused to survive her lover Pyramus (see Bottom's play in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*); (3) Dido; (4) The two victims of Jason's treachery, Hypsipyle and Medea; (5) Lucretia; (6) Ariadne; (7) Philomela, the victim of Tereus; (8) Phyllis, who slew herself for love of Demophon; (9) Hypermnestra, who accepted death at her father's hands rather than treacherously kill her husband. By the aid of some hints in the prologue, and of a curious mention of these "scintes legendes of Cupide" in the talk which precedes the Man of Law's story in the *Canterbury Tales*, it is possible to make a fair guess as to the names of the other ten women, in addition to Alcestis, whose praises Chaucer was too tired to hymn (see Professor Skeat's introductions to his editions of the *Legende*

and *Man of Lawes Tale*). They belong to the same class of heroines as the others, and we need not here record their names. For the nine legends he finished Chaucer had recourse chiefly to the *Metamorphoses* and *Heroides* of Ovid, but he used also two Latin works by Boccaccio, viz. his *De Claris Mulieribus* and *De Genealogia Deorum*, while the story of Dido is taken mainly from Virgil, and that of Hypsipyle and Medea from the *Historia Trojana* of Guido da Colonna. Two other points must be mentioned—(1) that, as far as we know, it was in this poem that Chaucer for the first time used the heroic couplet; (2) that the prologue exists in two different versions. The one which appears to be the earlier has 545 lines, of which 90, including one long passage on love tales, and a reference to Chaucer's own library of "sixty bookes olde and newe," all full of stories, do not reappear in the revised text. In this many lines are altered, the position of others transposed, and the 90 omitted lines replaced by 124 new ones, bringing the number in the second version to 579. Some of the alterations seem intended to make the poem more acceptable to the Queen, the rest are poetical improvements, too numerous to be mentioned here.

The great charm of the *Legende of Good Women* consists in its delightful prologue, with its chat about Chaucer's fondness for books and worship of the daisy, and the pretty scene in the Garden of Love, in which Alcestis intercedes for him. Of the separate legends many are as well told as we can imagine possible, notably those of Thisbe, Dido, and Ariadne. But here, as in the tragedies of the Monk's Tale, Chaucer, partly under the inspiration of Boccaccio, embarked upon a task against which his judgment rebelled before he was half-way through with it. To write twenty stories in succession on as many variations of

a single theme was to court monotony, and the monotony wearies the poet perhaps before most of his readers have become aware of it.

§ 60. **Review of Chaucer's Second Period.**—In reviewing at the end of the last chapter Chaucer's progress up to the date of his second Italian journey (1378-79), we noted that during the ten or twelve years which may separate his earliest poem from the *Complaynt of Mars*, we could only attribute to him the composition of about one-seventh part of his extant poetry, even though the whole of the Man of Law's Tale and part of that of the Monk were rather violently detached from their place in the *Canterbury Tales* to swell the work of these years. The period we have now been surveying is only about half as long, but was nearly three times as productive.[1] Possibly the more serious study of Italian models during and after his second visit to Italy gave Chaucer this new poetic impulse; possibly it was due to an increased interest in literature taken by Richard II. as he grew to manhood, or to the literary influence of Anne of Bohemia. We have noted how both the *Parlement of Foules* and the *Legende of Good Women* were connected with the Queen; and Richard II., who could give an enormous sum for two volumes of French romances, and who took an interest in the work of the "moral" Gower, may also have spurred Chaucer on to write. We know that the poet's life was no longer perpetually broken into by his despatch on foreign missions: the references in the *House of Fame* and the *Legende* to his books and his reading show us that, however irksome his work at the Custom-House may have been, it left

[1] According to my addition the exact number of lines is 14,337 as against 5313, but such measuring of poetry by the yard is rather unsatisfactory.

him free to devote his evenings to study and composition, with notable results. It may, indeed, be said that all Chaucer's poetry during this period bears the trace of hard work. He is no longer content, as in the *Lyf of Seint Cecyle* and *Grisilde*, to translate his author as he may; he alters and improves with a free hand, and brings all his learning to the embellishment of particular passages. The *Parlement* and the *Hous of Fame* especially illustrate this building up of poems, which yet remain essentially original, by the help of jewels sought for wherever they could be found. But if Chaucer read diligently during these years, his increased consciousness of what belonged to his art in no way checked the growth of his own poetic individuality. The increase of ease is very marked. He is on better terms with himself and his readers, and chats about himself and his own tastes with good confidence that people will be interested. In such chats, and in the character of Sir Panderus, we see the development of his humour, and we feel that this humour is the outcome of an increased knowledge of life. Already he is groping vaguely for a subject which shall give free scope to his now perfected powers; and a chance holiday from the Custom-House seems to have given him the idea for which he was in search.

CHAPTER VI

THE CANTERBURY TALES

§ 61. **Chaucer's own Pilgrimage (in 1385?).**— On the last day of their journey from Southwark to Canterbury, when his pilgrims are already approaching their destination, and all save one of them are

supposed to have told their tales, Chaucer stops to note the exact position of the sun as they rode into a village, and to tell us that from this and the length of his shadow, nearly twice his own height, he guessed the time as about four in the afternoon. He goes on to say that "the moones exaltacioun in mena Libra alway gan ascende," using "exaltacioun," apparently, not in its strict astrological sense,[1] as he does elsewhere (for this would give no meaning at all), but merely as expressing an upward course. The moon was rising then at four o'clock P.M. in the middle of Libra, and the day, as we know from another passage, was 20th April (old style). As we have already seen (§ 38, 3), Dr. Koch of Berlin assures us on high astronomical authority that towards the close of the fourteenth century the moon could only have risen at such an hour on such a day in one particular year, 1385. Chaucer's way of noting the hour, though it seems strange to people used to reckoning time only by their watches, is not the calculation of a student over his books. It tells us that he made his guess in the open air, and noted the moon rising so early in the afternoon with his own eyes. It tells us, that is, like two or three other little touches, that the poet one spring rode along the highway and made the pilgrimage to Canterbury in his own person, and, if Dr. Koch is right, that the year in which he did this was 1385. There is nothing against this date, and everything in its favour. In the previous February Chaucer had obtained the coveted permission to exercise his Comptrollership of the Customs by deputy, and it was the most natural thing in the world that as soon as the weather was fine and warm he should use his

[1] "The degree of a sign in the zodiac in which a planet has its greatest power."—Koch.

new-found liberty for an eight or ten days' jaunt in the country. In 1385, April 20 fell on a Thursday, and we may expect that after a four days' ride the return journey would be delayed till the following Sunday or Monday. Another three or four days' ride would bring the poet back to London on Wednesday, 26th April, and by a curious coincidence, the very next day, 27th April 1385, we find him knocking at the door of the Exchequer to obtain his own and his wife's pensions, a day or two earlier than usual. Clearly his holiday had proved rather expensive.

§ 62. **The Idea of the Canterbury Tales.**—As we have seen, during the winter of 1384-85 Chaucer was probably hard at work on his *Legende of Good Women*, in which a series of separate stories were linked together by a dramatic prologue. If we accept the view that the poet himself went on a pilgrimage to Canterbury in April 1385, we need not send him very far afield for the idea of his famous *Tales*. It has been customary, however, to assert that Chaucer was guided to his happiest inspiration by the example of the *Decamerone* of his contemporary, Boccaccio. In the *Decamerone* seven fine ladies and three fine gentlemen take refuge from the great plague of Florence (A.D. 1348) in a beautiful garden, and there during ten days of forgetfulness of the misery from which they have fled, each tells ten stories, mostly of amorous adventure, until the century of tales is duly complete. The contrast of this scheme with that of Chaucer's holds good whether the latter was consciously improving on an Italian model, or ignorant of its existence, and merely taking a step forward from the point he had already reached in his *Legende of Good Women*. It is certainly improbable that he possessed a copy of the *Decamerone* himself. A few of his stories cover the

same ground as some of Boccaccio's, but we know that he took *Grisilde* from Petrarch's version, not from the *Decamerone*, and in the other instances Latin or French parallels have been found which are mostly closer to Chaucer than anything in Boccaccio. Had the English poet possessed a copy of such a treasury of stories he would almost certainly have used at least a few of them, and as he has not done this we must conclude that he either did not know the *Decamerone* at all, or knew it only by hearsay, or by a casual glance during one of his Italian journeys. On the whole then we shall be quite safe in allowing Chaucer to retain the entire credit for the framework of the great series of *Tales* with which his name has always been chiefly connected.

§ 63. **The Two Sides of Pilgrimages.**—While the horror inspired by the murder of Becket was still fresh, the pilgrims to the scene of his martyrdom were doubtless inspired by a feeling of pure devotion. It was in such a spirit that Louis VII. of France came to return thanks for the recovery of his son from a dangerous illness, and offered at the tomb a ruby worth a king's ransom; and again, that our own Richard I., on his release from captivity, as soon as he landed at Sandwich, walked on foot to Canterbury Cathedral. In 1220 the saint's body had been translated to the gorgeous shrine prepared for its reception, and perhaps this great ceremony, the cost of which burdened the finances of five Archbishops, marked a new epoch in the devotion to St. Thomas. His shrine became one of the sights of Europe; the precincts of the cathedral were filled with booths as for a perpetual fair, and a pilgrimage in his honour was soon a pleasant holiday, in which the devotional element depended entirely on the character of the pilgrim. In 1370, on the fourth jubilee of Becket's

martyrdom, Simon of Sudbury, at that time Bishop of London, as he met the great crowd of pilgrims on the road, told them outright that their pilgrimage would avail them nothing. A few years later Wyclif and his followers condemned the levity and superstition of the pilgrims still more severely. But the popularity of the shrine remained as yet undiminished. The crowd returned the reproaches of the Bishop with threats and curses, and when, eleven years later, he was murdered by the London mob, his death was regarded as a judgment for his sacrilegious speech. So the merry pilgrimages went on, and pipers and story-tellers found their profit in amusing the holiday-makers by the way. But at times throughout the journey, and at the sight of the sacred relics of the saint, the old devotional feeling would break out afresh. In every company, we may be sure, there were a few simple-hearted men and women whose religious enthusiasm at such times would be contagious, though it could not check the merriment and ribaldry with which the journey was enlivened. If a pilgrimage was a holiday, it was still a holiday sanctioned by religion, of which every man could make the use he chose.

§ 64. **Chaucer's Pilgrims at the Tabard.**—The Tabard Inn, at which Chaucer represents his pilgrims as assembling, was part of the London estate of the Abbots of Hyde, and lay in the High Street of Southwark, a little to the south of London Bridge, and consequently not far from the Chapel of St. Thomas, which was built on one of its piers. It was called the Tabard from its sign of a sleeveless coat, now the traditional dress of a herald, and was probably about 1385 the chief among the many inns in Southwark. To travel in company was advisable, not only for merriment, but for safety against robbers; and as wayfarers in the fourteenth century started

with the sun, the intending pilgrims, and Chaucer among them, made their way to the inn overnight. When the last had arrived there were "wel nine and twenty" of them, or rather thirty, excluding the Host and the chronicler of the pilgrimage, in whom some of his fellow-travellers doubtless recognised the Comptroller of the Customs. Mediæval pilgrims were drawn from all classes; and all classes from a knight to a poor ploughman and a begging friar were here represented. The KNIGHT, a veteran soldier of the Cross, was just returned from a voyage, and brought with him his son, a young SQUIRE, ripe for love-making or deeds of war, and an attendant YEOMAN. No less than eleven of the pilgrims were in the service of the Church. Of these, the chief was a courtly and tender-hearted PRIORESS, who came escorted by her "CHAPELLEYN," or secretary (spoken of as the SECOND NUN), and three PRIESTS. Next to the Prioress is ranked a MONK, "a manly man, to been an abbot able," fonder of hunting than of books, and from the description of his horses, greyhounds, and dress, a person of some importance. A FRIAR, who found his glib tongue very useful in begging; a SOMPNOUR, or summoner of offenders against ecclesiastical law; a PARDONER, who sold pardons, and exhibited imaginary relics to be kissed for a groat,—these represented the lowest elements in the Church, of which the Prioress and Monk were respectable, if rather worldly, members. Ample atonement is made, however, in the portrait of the poor PARSON, in whom Chaucer depicts an ideal parish priest. With him we must reckon the CLERK OF OXFORD, who "had not getten him yet a benefice," but was doubtless in orders. He was as devoted to learning, and helping others to learn, as the Parson to the care of his parish; and the two, in their simple-minded devotion, represent

all that was best in the Church. From the other learned professions there came a SERGEANT-AT-LAW and a DOCTOR OF MEDICINE, both clever men: the Man of Law, a busy man enough, but pretending to be busier still by way of advertisement; the Doctor something of a miser. A FRANKLIN, or country gentleman, very fond of good eating and drinking, is the person of highest rank among the remaining pilgrims, who comprise a MERCHANT; a SHIPMAN, not much better than a pirate; a MILLER, skilled in taking thrice his proper tolls; a rascal COOK; a MANCIPLE (or purchaser of provisions for one of the Inns of Court); and a REEVE (or farm-bailiff), both of them able to hoodwink their employers; and, as against all these rogues, five respectable London Burgesses (a HABERDASHER, CARPENTER, WEAVER, DYER, and TAPYCER, or tapestry-maker), all of one guild; and a poor PLOUGHMAN, brother to the Parson, and his counterpart for goodness. Besides the Prioress and her Nun there was one other woman among the pilgrims, a WIFE OF BATH, expert in cloth-making and in getting the better of her husbands, of whom she had had five.

The Host of the Tabard, Harry Bailey, a great fellow with bright eyes, fit to be a marshal in a hall, was so pleased with this varied company of guests that when they had supped he proposed to them "a mirth," to which they good-humouredly assented before they knew what it was. The Host's plan for their amusement was that each pilgrim should tell two stories on the way to Canterbury and two on their return, the best story to be rewarded by a supper at the common cost. He himself would ride with them as guide and judge. The plan was accepted; the pilgrims went to their beds, and the next morning were roused by the Host, who duly started the story-telling as soon as they reached "the

wateryng of Seint Thomas," the second milestone on the old road to Canterbury.

§ 65. **Number of the Tales.**—According to Harry Bailey's proposal each of the thirty-one pilgrims was to tell four stories, so that if his scheme had been carried out in full the number of the *Canterbury Tales* would have been 124, besides a supplementary one told by a Yeoman who joins the company on the road. Including this supplementary story the number actually written is twenty-four, of which one (the Squire's) is left half-told, and another (the Cook's) scarcely begun, while the poet himself is allowed two attempts. The pilgrims who are left altogether silent are the Knight's Yeoman, the Ploughman, the five Burgesses, and the second and third of the Prioress's attendant priests. The Priests are not described at all, and the five Burgesses not individually, but as a group, so that we find we have the part or whole of a story told by all save two of the characters in whom we are specially interested. Thus, if Chaucer's scheme had provided for only a single tale from each pilgrim we should not have to regard it as left very incomplete. The needless magnitude of his plan is perhaps the only argument in favour of the view that it was intended to imitate the hundred stories of the *Decamerone*.

§ 66. **Order in which the Tales were told.**—We have already alluded more than once to the chats on the road by which the Tales were intended to be linked together and the monotony of story-telling relieved. Prologues of some kind are attached to all of the Tales that have come down to us, but only about half of them are real links giving the verdict of the company on the last tale as well as the invitation of the Host to another of the pilgrims to tell a new one. By the help of these real links we are able to group together in three instances two, in one three,

in one four, and in one seven, or really eight, of the Tales. Moreover in these prologues and links we have

(i.) References to six places on the road, viz. Deptford, Greenwich, Rochester, Sittingbourne, Boughton-under-Blee, and a rather mysterious village called Bob-up-and-Down.

(ii.) Remarks by both the Clerk and the Merchant, implying that the Wife of Bath's Tale had been told before theirs, and presumably on the same day.

(iii.) Four distinct notes of time, viz. prime[1]; ten in the forenoon, on 18th April; prime, again; and four in the afternoon; besides other less precise references.

Now the order of the *Tales* differs considerably in the different manuscripts which have come down to us, but in the best manuscript of all (called the Ellesmere, from the family to whom it belongs) it is as follows—the letters, arrows, and other annotations being, of course, inserted for our own ends:—

[A] General Prologue.
1. Knight's Tale.
2. Miller's.
3. Reeve's.
("*Halfway prime.*" Deptford *and Greenwich* mentioned.)
4. Cook's.

[B1] 5. Man of Law's. (18th April, 10 A.M.)

[D] 6. Wife of Bath's. (*Sittingbourne* mentioned as next town on road.)
7. Friar's.
8. Somnour's. ("*We been almost at toune.*")

[E] 9. Clerk's.
10. Merchant's.

[F] 11. Squire's. ("*For it is prime.*")
12. Franklin's.

[C] 13. Doctor's.
14. Pardoner's.

[B2] 15. Shipman's.
16. Prioress's.
17, 18. Chaucer's tales of Sir Thopas and of Melibee.
19. Monk's. (*Rochester* mentioned.)
20. Nun's Priest's.

[G] 21. Second Nun's.
22. Canon's Yeoman's. (*Boughton-under-Blee* mentioned.)

[H] 23. Manciple's. (*Bob-up-and-Down* mentioned.)

[I] 24. Parson's. (4 P.M. ending *Canterbury.*)

[1] The meaning of this word varies. Chaucer seems to use it for the hours between 6 and 9 A.M.

The nine lines drawn at intervals show that we have no links to connect the tales which they separate. There is, indeed, such a link between the Manciple's and the Parson's, but as the Manciple's is apparently told in the morning and the Parson's at four in the afternoon, the probability that there is some mistake prevents us from regarding these two tales as really joined together.

The order of the *Tales* as thus given by the Ellesmere MS. seems very nearly right, but there is one obvious error in it. In the Prologue to the Wife of Bath's Tale, the pilgrims are not far from Sittingbourne. In the Prologue to the Monk's the Host says: "Lo, Rowchestre stant heere faste by," and as Rochester comes before Sittingbourne on the Canterbury road, we see at once that we must move the group of tales (15-20) which includes the Monk's to come before that (6-8) which includes the Wife of Bath's. We are confirmed in doing this by finding that the Shipman's Prologue (which heads the Monk's section) is actually placed after the Man of Law's Tale in probably the oldest MS. now extant, and that it fits in exactly as a link between the two tales. In this MS. (Harl. 7334) the link is ascribed to the Squire, to whom it is quite unsuited, and in others to the Sompnour, but in one manuscript (Arch. Seld. B. 14) it is duly credited to the Shipman, and we are not without means of guessing how its confusion arose. A passage in the tale shows clearly that it was originally written to be told by a married woman, *i.e.* by the Wife of Bath, the only married woman among the pilgrims, and while this was her story, she was probably intended to follow the Man of Law in amusing the company on the second day. When a new prologue and tale were written for the Wife, these should have been assigned to the

third day, but the scribes confused the positions of her new tale and her old, and then, not knowing what to do with the Shipman's Prologue, gave it, some to the Squire, others to the Sompnour, merely because their names also began with S.

Together with the Shipman's group Dr. Furnivall (to whom and to the late Mr. Henry Bradshaw the right ordering of the *Canterbury Tales* is entirely due) moves up, in reverse order, the linked tales of the Doctor and Pardoner, *i.e.* whereas these tales in the Ellesmere MS. precede the Shipman's group, he brings them up after the Shipman's group and before the Wife of Bath's. This change is not imperative; but as the tales are not wanted between those of the groups of the Squire and Second Nun, it may at least be acquiesced in. The lettering of the different groups, A, B, C, etc., is now generally adopted in all references to the *Tales*.

§ 67. **Stages and Duration of the Pilgrimage.**—The time occupied by the journey to Canterbury was probably no less than four days. This may seem very excessive for a ride of only fifty-six miles; but we must remember that many of the pilgrims were ill-mounted and inexpert riders (thus of the Shipman it is said "he rode upon a rouncy as he coude") and that even main-roads in the fourteenth century were often little better than quagmires, and this Canterbury road in particular is twice spoken of by the Host as "the slough." Travellers on urgent business, no doubt, rode considerable distances, as much as forty miles in a day, but from twenty to twenty-five miles seems to have been considered a good day's journey. For a mixed company of holiday-makers forty-six miles in three days over fairly level roads, and ten miles for the last day's ride over Bean Hill, would not apparently have been abnormally slow progress.

Moreover, we have two important precedents to guide us. In 1358 the Queen-mother Isabella went on a pilgrimage to Canterbury. She left London on 7th June, slept that night at Dartford, slept at Rochester on 8th June, at Ospringe on 9th June, and reached Canterbury on the 10th, *i.e.* on the fourth day from starting. In 1360 John of France in his journey from London to Calais slept at Dartford 1st July, dined there next day, slept at Rochester 2nd July, dined at Sittingbourne and slept at Ospringe 3rd July, reaching Canterbury 4th July. The records of other fourteenth century pilgrimages confirm the presumption that Dartford, Rochester, and Ospringe (where some trace of the old Pilgrims' House still exists) were the regular sleeping-places on the road; and if we imagine our pilgrims as having kept to them we shall get the simplest explanation of all the references to places and time in the conversations, and have the journey divided into fairly equal lengths. The two references to "prime" dispel the old idea that the whole pilgrimage was accomplished on a single day. If we endeavour to compress it into two days we must make the pilgrims ride the almost impossible distance of forty-six miles to Ospringe on the first day, and only ten on the second. If we allow three days we must still make the pilgrims ride thirty miles—more than half the distance—on the first day, sixteen on the second, and ten on the third. We must also make the words of the Host to the Man of Law, which have all the appearance of beginning a day's story-telling after a late start, merely mark a resumption of it after an early dinner. The four days' journey is exposed to no such difficulties or inequalities, and is therefore adopted in the following summary of the incidents of the journey. It must be noted that the 17th April

1385 (old style) would answer to the 25th April of the reformed calendar.

§ 68. **Tales of the First Day.**—For the first mile or more of their journey the drone of the Miller's bagpipes provided the pilgrims with sufficient entertainment; but at the second milestone, "the wateryng of Seint Thomas," the Host called his company together to draw lots as to who should tell the first tale. "By aventure or sort or cas," or rather by a little arrangement on the Host's part, the shortest "cut" fell to the Knight, the person of greatest dignity among the pilgrims, and with a good grace he forthwith told his story of the love of Palamon and Arcyte for the fair Emelye, the "yongè suster shene" of the great Theseus, "duke" of Athens. Young and old praised the Knight's tale as a noble story, and the Host in high delight called on the Monk to cap it with another. But the Miller, who had had time to quench the thirst caused by his piping, and was now sadly drunk, insisted on being allowed to tell what he called a "noble tale," about a carpenter and his wife and a young Oxford clerk. The carpenter is shamelessly befooled in the story; and the Reeve, who had been bred a carpenter himself, retaliated with a tale of the revenge taken by two young Cambridge clerks on a miller who had succeeded in stealing the college corn despite all their precautions. When the Reeve was on the point of beginning his tale Deptford and Greenwich were both in sight, and the time was "half-wey prime," *i.e.* between 7 and 8 A.M. His story was succeeded by that of the Cook, of which we have only the first sixty lines, introducing to us Perkin Revelour, an idle London apprentice. By the help of Reeve and Cook, Deptford must have been reached about nine o'clock, and the pilgrims no

doubt stopped here for an early dinner. When they remounted their horses the Yeoman may have been the first speaker. In many of the manuscripts the *Tale of Gamelyn* is here inserted—a poem or "lay" in rough, vigorous verse, probably at least a quarter of a century earlier than the *Canterbury Tales*. The plot is similar to that of Shakspere's *As You Like It*, and Chaucer no doubt intended to re-tell it as a woodland tale exactly suited to the sturdy Yeoman. No other stories, or raw materials for stories, belonging to this day have come down to us, and we can only guess that the five Burgesses were the narrators for the rest of the afternoon, until at about five or six o'clock the pilgrims finished their first day's ride of fifteen miles, and rested at Dartford for supper and a night's lodging.

§ 69. **Tales of the Second Day.**—Between Dartford and Rochester lay no town of any size, and, like King John of France before them, the pilgrims were therefore obliged to dine where they had slept, and did not start until nearly ten o'clock. The Host noted the hour by the length of his shadow (incidentally letting us know that the day was 18th April), and with a little exhortation against wasting time, called on the Man of Law for a tale. He has no thrifty tale to tell, is the reply, for Chaucer has told them all.

> But nathèlees, I recchè noght a bene
> Though I come after hym, with hawè-bakè
> I speke in prose and lat hym rymès makè.

He remembers a tale once told him by a merchant, and after these apologies we have given us the beautiful story of Constance (see § 47). "This was a thrifty tale for the nones" is the Host's comment, and he calls on the Parson, as another "learned man of lore," to be the next speaker. Unfortunately in his enthusiasm he raps out an oath, for which the

good Parson reproves him, thereby provoking the wrath of the Shipman against his Lollardy. The Shipman tells a story himself of how an unsuspicious merchant was deceived by his wife and a friar; and then the Host, always anxious to give the gentle folk due precedence, courteously asks the Prioress to tell her tale. After a beautiful invocation, she recites the history of a little chorister murdered by the Jews for his devotion to the Blessed Virgin, telling the legend so perfectly as to hush even the most boisterous of the pilgrims. The silence was broken by the Host calling Chaucer to him with a joke on his stoutness and abstracted look. The poet's contribution is the inimitable *Tale of Sir Thopas*, a parody on the long-winded romances then going out of fashion; and the Host, who could only see the absurdity and not the fun, soon bade him stop and "tell somethinge in prose." The *Tale of Melibee*, an allegory of prudence, was Chaucer's second attempt, and this was heard out to the bitter end. The next story-teller, however, the Monk, endured the poet's first fate, for his string of tragedies, as we have seen (§ 48), was interrupted when he had told but seventeen of them. The Nun's Priest, who followed him, was far more successful. Indeed, his story of the gallant Cock who fell a victim to Reynard the Fox, and escaped from between his teeth by his own wit, is one of the very best of all the tales. It probably closed the story-telling for the day, as Rochester had been spoken of as "fastè by" ere the Monk began his tragedies, and it was at Rochester that the pilgrims must have slept their second night.

§ 70. **Tales of the Third Day.**—We have no conversation on the road to tell us how the third day's story-telling began, but according to Dr. Furnivall's conjecture, the Doctor's tale of Appius and Virginia,

and the Pardoner's of Death and the Three Brothers, came early on this morning. The Pardoner wanted both a drink and a bite of a cake before he began, and after prefacing his tale with a sufficiently candid account of his method of earning a living, wound up by handing round his relics to be kissed, much to the Host's indignation. The Wife of Bath imitated the Pardoner in the frankness of her history of her married life, and told a story of the Court of Arthur, illustrating the fondness of women for getting their own way. While listening to her matrimonial experiences the Friar and Sompnour had nearly come to blows; and as the pilgrims were approaching Sittingbourne, each told a tale to the discredit of the other's profession. After dining at Sittingbourne, the Host called on the Clerk to tell "som murie thyng of aventures," and was rewarded with the beautiful tale of the patience of Grisilde. This, or rather the *envoy* which Chaucer rather incongruously added to it, inspired the Merchant to narrate the trickery and hardihood of an unfaithful wife, relieving the sordid story of January and May with some pleasant fairy humours. By the time his story was ended, the pilgrims must have ridden the six miles from Sittingbourne to Ospringe, and alighted there to pass the night at the old Pilgrims' House.

§ 71. **Tales of the Fourth Day.**—The next morning the Squire opened the story-telling with his half-told tale of Cambuscan, the Magic Horse and the tender-hearted Princess who could understand all the language of birds. This was followed by the Franklin's story of a woman's loyalty to her word, and by the Second Nun's *Legend of Saint Cecyle*. As this last was finished, and the pilgrims, five miles on their road, had arrived at Boughton-under-Blee, a Canon and his Yeoman overtook them. The Canon was an

alchemist who, in trying to turn lead into gold, had ruined both himself and his dupes. His servant's free talk drove him from the company, and the Yeoman then told a story of another Canon who robbed a poor priest by his pretended discoveries. The pilgrims were now toiling up Blean Hill, and the Cook, who was heavy with sleep or drink, had fallen so far behind that the Host feared for his safety. A quarrel between the Cook and the Manciple having been patched up, the latter tells a story as to how crows became black. At last all the pilgrims save the Parson are supposed to have told their tales, and the Host for the second time calls on the good man to keep his troth. He is a southern man, he says, and "kan nat geeste *rum, ram, ruf* by lettre," like the northern alliterative poets, but he will "telle a murie tale in prose." This proves to be a sermon on penitence, and to a discourse on the text: "Stondeth upon the weyes, and seeth, and axeth of olde pathes, which is the goode weye, and walketh in that wey, and ye shal fynde refresshynge for your soules," the merry company, at last reminded of the object of its pilgrimage, draws near the city which enshrined the bones of the great Archbishop. Chaucer, alas, does not even tell us of the entry into Canterbury, but in the *Tale of Beryn*, an unknown continuator has pictured the pilgrims at the Chequers of the Hope Inn, and told us, in his own fashion, of what befell on their visit to the shrine. In his *Tale of Thebes*, Lydgate essays to tell the first story on the return journey. But neither of these well-meaning admirers of Chaucer can supply their master's place.

§ 72. **The Prologue.**—The number of words now obsolete in the *Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales* is unusually high, and for this reason it should not be read the first among Chaucer's poems; nevertheless

it usually is read first, and is so well known that little need here be said of it. For keen observation and vivid presentment this gallery of character-sketches has never been surpassed. The portraits, we should note, are all such as one traveller might draw of another. There is no attempt to show that the best of the pilgrims had their weak points, and the worst their good ones. For the best Chaucer has hearty admiration, for the worst a boundless tolerance, which yet only thinly cloaks the keenest satire. One and all he views from his holiday standpoint, building up his descriptions with such notes as he would naturally gather as he rode along with them on his pilgrimage—notes of dress, of speech and manner, of their talk about themselves and their doings—until we can see his fellow-pilgrims as clearly as if we, too, had mounted our rouncies and ridden along with them. It would be pleasant to chat about each of the pilgrims in turn: to wonder why the Knight had never fought in the war with France, or to note that hints for the character of the Prioress are taken from the *Roman de la Rose*, and that the emphasis laid on her manners and deportment is probably due to the fact that her Priory, like that of St. Mary's, Winchester, described in the Chaucer Society's *Essays*, may have been a finishing school for girls and a residence for gentle ladies. But for such details students must be referred to annotated editions of the Prologue, or to a useful little book by Mr. Saunders, entitled *Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*.

§ 73. **Tales of the Gentles.**—(*a*.) The KNIGHT'S Tale is founded on the *Teseide* of Boccaccio. The *Teseide* contains 9054 lines, the *Knightes Tale* 2050, of which only about 270 are translated from the Italian and another 500 adapted, so that Chaucer left him-

self free play. He differs from Boccaccio in making Palamon see Emily first, in making the cousins quarrel over their love, and in representing Emily as ignorant of it. As has been already noted, it is conjectured that this tale is a recast of an earlier poem, containing "al the love of Palamon and Arcyte," which probably followed the *Teseide* much more closely. Dr. Koch has remarked that the resemblance is greatest where the free course of the narrative is checked, *i.e.* in descriptions, speeches, or prayers, and he shows that these passages are probably worked up from the old *Palamon and Arcyte*, rather than taken directly from the Italian. This is the longest of the *Canterbury Tales*, and the most splendid and ornate. The descriptions of the three temples of Mars, Venus, and Diana, are the most famous of all the "purple patches" in Chaucer. The entry of Theseus into Athens, the two cousins catching their first sight of Emily from their prison window, the sudden meeting in the woods, the fight and its interruption by Theseus and his hunting-party, the mustering for the tourney, the death of Arcyte—these form a succession of pictures of singular vividness and colour. The characters of Palamon, the single-hearted lover, and Arcyte, torn between love and honour, are slightly sketched. Theseus, the older knight, chivalrous in defence of women, hot-tempered and cruel to his enemies, yet easily pacified and ready to laugh at the absurdities of lovers, is a much more finished portrait. As a story-teller the SQUIRE is worthy of his father. His tale is conceived in the same chivalrous vein, but is founded on some Eastern original not yet identified. The great Cambuscan may be traced ultimately to the travels of Marco Polo; the Horse of Brass and the Magic Ring, Mirror and Sword, are part of the common machinery of Eastern tales. The

"falcon peregryn," to whom Canacee is so pitiful, is doubtless an injured princess metamorphosed by some magician. But the tale remains "half told," and even Spenser, in his *Faery Queene*, has not been able to satisfy our curiosity as to how it should end. We may be sure that Chaucer's use of his unknown originals in this poem was extremely free, and the amusing passage in which the people comment on the miraculous gifts is characteristically his own.

(ii.) The Tales of the CLERK, MAN OF LAW, and FRANKLIN, are linked together by their common exaltation of a single virtue to the exclusion of the rest. The Clerk magnifies Patience, the Lawyer (on whom the tale was foisted when he had announced his intention to speak in prose) Fortitude, the Franklin, Truth. The first and second we have already examined (§§ 46, 47), and have only to note here the addition to the *Clerkes Tale* of the apostrophe, "O stormy peple, unsad and ever untrewe," and the Envoy, "Grisild is deed and eek hir patience," which Chaucer introduces with the words, so inappropriate to the Clerk, "and lat us stinte of ernestful matere"! Both additions are in Chaucer's strongest style, and were probably written about the year 1387, when he had lost his offices and belonged to the opposition to the party in power. The Franklin's Tale professes to be founded on an old Breton lay, of which no trace has yet been discovered. A similar story is told as the fifth of the tenth day in the *Decamerone*, but the differences of detail are too great for this to be the source on which Chaucer drew. As to the inverted morality of the tale, nothing need be added to what has been said already on Grisilde's acquiescence in the murder of her children. Husband and wife believe "Trouthe is the hyest thing that man may kepe," and to keep troth is

regarded for the nonce as justifying all incidental sins. The tale (which is written in couplets) is easily and skilfully told, but is not in Chaucer's strongest style.

(iii.) From the tales of chivalry and nobility we may turn to the two legends of saints respectively assigned to the PRIORESS and the SECOND NUN. At the latter of these we have already looked (§ 45), and noted its comparative feebleness and prosaic adherence to its original. The Prioress's Tale, on the other hand, is, of its kind, as perfect as anything Chaucer ever wrote. Stories of little Christian boys murdered by the Jews for their devotion to the Blessed Virgin were common in the Middle Ages, and the theme is peculiarly suited to the tender-hearted Prioress to whom it is assigned. Three verses of the Prologue bear a strong resemblance to the Invocation to the Blessed Virgin which prefaces the Second Nun's Tale (*Lyf of Seint Cecyle*), and one of them is borrowed from the same passage in Dante. No exact original of the tale has been found, and it reads as if Chaucer were quite unfettered by any necessities of translation. Its beauty, its ideal suitability to the Prioress, the fact that the first verse of the Prologue, with its "quod she," was obviously written for her, the possible sly hit at the hunting Monk in the line "as monkes ben or elles oughten be," the fact that "the murye wordes of the Hoste to Chaucer" which follow it are written in the same seven-line stanzas, whereas all the other talks in the *Tales* are in couplets—all these considerations tell strongly in favour of the story having been written expressly for its present place in the *Canterbury Tales* (*i.e.* probably about 1386), though so good a scholar as Professor Skeat is content to assign it to about the same date as the *Lyf of Seint Cecyle* (1373?) on the score of the similarity in subject and metre.

(iv.) Our last two "Gentles," the MONK and the DOCTOUR OF PHYSIK, both go to history for their subjects. Of twelve of the Monk's tragedies we have already spoken (§ 48), the remaining five are concerned with Pedro of Spain (stabbed by his brother, 1369); Pedro of Cyprus (assassinated, also in 1369); Bernabo Visconti, Duke of Milan (died in prison, 1385); and Ugolino of Pisa (starved to death, with his children, in 1289). The second and third of these unfortunates are commemorated in only a stanza each; Pedro of Spain is allowed two stanzas, the second of which is interesting from its punning allusions; but it is the seven stanzas, which tell of the death of Ugolino and his children, that stand out from all the rest of the Monk's Tale. They are founded on the story in Dante's *Inferno*, canto xxxiii., but Chaucer has added something of his own, and the pathos of the whole is heartrending. Yet we may note his insistence on the tender age of the children (one of his additions) as a slight mark of weakness: Dante is content with writing "Anselmuccio mio" (my little Anselm) instead of Anselmo. As to the Doctor's story of Appius and Virginia, this is rather poor work. It is an expansion to about four times its length of a passage of some seventy lines in the *Roman de la Rose*. The professed obligation to Livy is merely a translation of a line in the *Roman*, and, as Professor Lounsbury has pointed out, it is inconceivable that Chaucer, if he had read Livy's pathetic story at first hand, should have spoilt it in the way he has. To make Appius deliberately kill his daughter in cold blood, instead of in a sudden frenzy of despair, was a fatal mistake.

§ 74. **Tales of the Tradesfolk.**—The four Tales which we bring together under this heading, those of the SHIPMAN, WIFE OF BATH, MERCHANT, and MAN-

CIPLE, are all marked by their license and lack of reticence, also by their shrewdness, knowledge of human nature (not at its highest), and sturdy middle-class independence. It is the Wife of Bath who delivers the fine speech on what makes a gentleman :—

> But for ye speken of swich gentillesse
> As is descended out of old richesse,
> That therfore sholden ye be gentil-men,
> Swich arrogancé is nat worth an hen.
> Looke, who that is moost vertuous alway,
> Pryvee and apert, and moost entendeth ay
> To do the gentil dedes that he kan
> Take hym for the grettest gentil-man.
> Crist wol we clayme of hym oure gentillesse,
> Nat of oure eldres for hire old richesse.

It is the Manciple, again, who insists that the rich tyrant is no better than the poor thief. There is plenty of wisdom in all the talk about the goodness of good wives and the badness of bad ones, and the satire upon women is keen and yet not inhuman. The Manciple's Tale is built up on a story in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; the sources of the other tales are not known, though parallels to them are not lacking. The morality of all of them is the morality of the *Decamerone* or the French *fabliaux*, but the digressions are mostly of more importance than the stories, and in these, as in the passage we have quoted from the Wife of Bath, we often have Chaucer at his best. As to the Wife's Prologue, it can only be said that the poet never wrote anything more masterly. It is the unblushing confession by a vulgar woman of her most intimate relations with her five husbands, and we can imagine that while it was in progress the Prioress rode a long way off. One incident may be recorded. The fifth husband, the Clerk Jankyn, had a library of invectives against women, and out of these—*Valerius* (*i.e.* Walter Map)

de non ducenda uxore, Theophrastus *De Nuptiis*, St. Jerome "against Jovinian"—he used to read aloud, till one night the Wife tore three leaves out of his book, was so soundly beaten that she swooned away, and evermore ruled her repentant husband for his own good. Chaucer's remark on how different the books would have been if women had written them, shows that he had no great sympathy with Jankyn's favourite literature.

§ 75. **Tales of the Common Folk.**—(i.) We now come to the Tales of the MILLER who took triple toll, the REEVE who always got the better of his lord, the sleek intriguing FRIAR, the SOMPNOUR who winked at sin for a bottle of wine, and the COOK who was their fit comrade. Doubtless most of these rascals had some good in them, and a modern writer might suit them with sentimental stories which should leave us reflecting on the virtues of rogues and the prejudices of honest men. In the fourteenth century these refinements had not been invented. Churls they were, and churls' tales they told, says Chaucer, and if his readers dislike the stories they must turn the leaf and seek other ones. The plea is dramatically unassailable; but, to be honest, we must go a step farther. Clearly, Chaucer took a pleasure in telling these stories, and he told them marvellously well. The Reeve's Tale, one of the most monstrous of all, is perhaps the greatest artistic success, unsurpassed in all Chaucer's works for swiftness, vividness, and humour. To speak plainly, these churls' tales are all concerned with low tricks or downright sin. All that can be said for them is that they are told merrily and thoughtlessly, with no lingering over sin for its own sake, and with a general understanding that these things are done in the land of fiction. If we think of the actors in them as

parishioners of the good Parson, whom it was his duty to turn into Christian men and women, the humour of the stories dies away in an instant, and there is nothing left but tragedy. We may add that the plots seem to have been mostly taken from French or English popular stories, which Chaucer worked up in his own way.

(ii.) In three other tales, those of the PARDONER, NUN'S PRIEST, and CANON'S YEOMAN, Chaucer's mastery is hardly less, while his plots are far happier. Like the Wife of Bath the Pardoner finds a safety-valve in a prologue, and his tale, of the three brothers who met Death in the form of a treasure over which they slew each other, is told with more sternness than we find elsewhere in Chaucer. In delightful contrast to this is the Priest's Tale, with its digressions on dreams and its banter between cock and hen. Two Italian stories and a Latin one have been found which offer parallels to the Pardoner's Tale (the plot of which is found also in Pali!), while a fable, *Dou Cat et dou Werpil*, by Marie de France, contains in thirty-eight lines the germ of the Priest's. For the Canon's Yeoman's story of the Alchemist no parallel even has been discovered, and it is written with so much insight into the tricks of those who professed their ability to multiply gold that Tyrwhitt imagined Chaucer to have recently had some personal dealings with these rascals. All three tales should be read as in the poet's best style.

§ 76. **Chaucer's own Tales.**—The talk before the Man of Law's Tale, which alludes to the *Legende of Good Women* as if the poet still hoped to complete it, is almost certainly earlier than "the murye wordes of the Hoste to Chaucer" which herald the *Tale of Sir Thopas*. We can hardly doubt that the Lawyer, who says distinctly "I spoke in prose," was meant

originally to tell the *Tale of Melibee*, which Chaucer later on humorously took upon himself after making Harry Bailey break off his parody of the romances. *Melibee* is a translation of a French version (perhaps by Jean de Meung) of the *Liber Consolationis et Consilii* of Albertano of Brescia. It is much more easily and pleasantly written than the *Boece*, but most modern readers will find the "noble wyf Prudence" a very dull orator. Of *Sir Thopas*, on the other hand, we would gladly have more. It is an example of the best kind of parody which presents much of the charm of the original and yet is full of sly hits. The immense preparations and the small exploits, the "fair bearing" which lay in "drawing aback full fast" from the battle, the return to town as a prelude to resuming the fray, are all conceived in the most delightful vein of mock heroics, and we cannot quite forgive Harry Bailey his interruption. It is hardly necessary to point out the good taste of Chaucer's avoidance of reciting a serious poem in his own person in competition with those of his imaginary pilgrims.

§ 77. **The Parson's Tale and the Retractation.**— We may not leave the *Canterbury Tales* without dealing with two difficult questions. The Parson's sermon on penitence, as we have it, consists for the most part of a paraphrase of the *Somme de Vices et de Vertus* of Frère Lourens, a contemporary of Jean de Meung, in which the sacramental view of penitence and the need of confession to a priest, of penance and absolution, is duly upheld. The parts not translated from Frère Lourens are of a more evangelical character, and it has been maintained that these formed the first draft of the work, the long passages from the French being the additions of a clumsy interpolator. The sermon, as we have it,

is ill-arranged, and contains enough illogicalities and contradictions to make the theory of interpolation plausible. It is possible that Chaucer showed his first draft to a friendly monk, who pronounced it very incomplete, and was good-naturedly bidden to set it right. It is even possible, as has been contended, that the sermon was re-written after Chaucer's death in the interests of Catholic orthodoxy, or, as we may prefer to say, of completeness. But this need not make us believe either that the poet himself was a Wycliffite, or that he meant his poor Parson to be a Wycliffite, or that this supposed first draft was intended as a Wycliffite sermon. Undoubtedly the *Canterbury Tales* show the influence of Wyclif. Down to almost the close of the theologian's life he had carried the common sense of England with him, and shared with Chaucer the patronage of John of Gaunt. Moreover, Wyclif's positive teaching brought into the Church some of the new zeal and life that come at times of reformation, heretical or orthodox, and a country priest who had felt his influence at Oxford would be likely to closely resemble Chaucer's ideal parson. But all this is a very different matter from maintaining that the poet followed the theologian in the developments of the last few years of his life and consciously endeavoured to spread his doctrines; for this supposition is contradicted by the whole tone and temper of Chaucer's poetry.

The question of Chaucer's religious beliefs is raised again, though in a different form, by the Retractation found at the end of the *Canterbury Tales* in the best MSS. Here we find written :—

I biseke yow mekely for the mercy of God that ye preye for me, that Crist have mercy on me and forgeve me my giltes: and namely of my translacions and enditynges of worldly vanitees, the whiche I revoke in my retraccions. As is the

book of Troilus, the book also of Fame, the book of the xxv. Ladies, the book of the Duchesse, the book of Seint Valentynes day of the Parlement of Briddes, the Tales of Canterbury, thilke that sownen into synne, the book of the Leon and many another book if they were in my remembrance, and many a song and many a leccherous lay, that Crist for his grete mercy forgeve me the synne.

Only the *Boece* and his religious poems are excepted from condemnation. The incorrectness of the allusion to the *Legende* as the "book of the xxv. Ladies" throws some doubt on the genuineness of the Retractation, and many of Chaucer's lovers do not hesitate to pronounce this also a monkish invention. To the present writer it seems to have a genuine ring, nor does it appear contrary to human nature for the dying poet to stigmatise his works as "worldly vanitees" while abstaining, as far as we know, from any attempt to suppress them.

CHAPTER VII

LATER MINOR POEMS—CHAUCER'S RANK AS A POET

§ 78. **The Former Age, and Fortune.**—These two poems are both inserted in the best manuscript of Chaucer's *Boece* (Camb. MS. li. 3, 21). The first of them consists of eight stanzas of eight lines each, the last line of the seventh being unluckily wanting. The first four stanzas are founded on Boethius (Bk. ii. metre v.) and other hints are taken from the *Roman de la Rose*. The poem is a pleasant and ingenious composition on the old theme of the Golden Age. Far more important is the *Fortune* or *Balade de visage*[1] *sans peinture*, as it is called in the MSS., the "unpainted face" being that of the friend

[1] *Visage* is miswritten *village*.

who is faithful in adversity. A strict ballade consists of three eight-line stanzas followed by a quatrain containing the envoy, usually addressed either to a prince or a lady. Only three rhymes are allowed, and the same line recurs at the end of each stanza, and of the envoy, to form the refrain. In the *Fortune* Chaucer has given us a triple ballade with a single envoy of seven lines (six in most MSS.). The first ballade is entitled *Le Pleintif countre Fortune*, and has as its refrain, "For fynally, Fortúne, I thee defye." The second gives *le Responsse de Fortune au Pleintif*, opening with the fine lines :—

> No man is wreeched, but him-self hit wene
> And he that hath himself hath suffisaunce.

Fortune reminds the poet that he is born under her reign of variance ; she has taught him to know true friends from false, but his anchor still holds, "and eek thou hast thy beste frend alyve." The plaintiff replies and Fortune again answers him, but in the end she takes up his cause, and it is in her name that the envoy is written :—

> Prynces, I prey yow of yowre gentilesse,
> Lat nat this man on me thus crye and pleyne,
> And I shall quyté yow yowre bysynesse
> At my requeste, as thre of yow or tweyne ;
> And, but yow lest releve hym of hys peyne,
> Preyeth hys beste frend, of his noblesse,
> That to som beter estat he may atteyne.

It is the fourth of these lines that is omitted in all the MSS. save one, nor can we explain the allusions, either with it or without it, though we may guess that the poem was written after Chaucer's loss of office in December 1386. The character of Fortune and some phrases are derived from the second book of the *De Consolatione*, and Professor

Skeat has shown that hints are also taken from the *Roman de la Rose*, whose lines

> Je perdi trestous mes amis
> Fors ung—

may, indeed, be the foundation of the whole poem.

§ 79. **Truth, Gentilesse, Lak of Stedfastnesse.**—These three ballades strike a graver note than is common in Chaucer, and the first and second contain some of his finest lines. All three are influenced or inspired by Boethius, but the *Truth* owes less to him than the others. All three also are written in seven-line stanzas, the first and third having envoys. The *Truth* is headed in one MS. *Balade de bon conseyl*. It opens with the magnificent line—

> Flee fro the pres and dwelle with sothfastnesse,

and contains the fine passage—

> Here is non home, here nys but wyldernesse.
> Forthe, pylgryme, forthe! forthe, beste, out of thi stal!
> Knowe thi contré, loke up, thonk God of al!
> Holde the heye weye, and lat thi gost thee lede,
> And trouthé shal delyver, it is no drede.

The last line forms the burden or refrain.

The *Gentilesse* has the same theme as the passage quoted from the Wife of Bath in § 74. Here we are taught—

> For unto vertue longeth dignytee
> And nought the reverse, saufly dar I deeme,
> Al were he mytre, croune, or dyademe.

The *Lak of Stedfastnesse*, a far inferior poem, laments the old days when "mannes word was obligacioun," and ends with the notable "envoy to King Richard"—

> O prince, desire for to be honourable;
> Cherishe thi folke and hate extorcioun;
> Suffre no thing that may be reprevable
> To thyn estate doon in thi regyoune.
> Shewe forthe thy swerde of castigacioune;

Drede God, do lawe, love thorow all goodnesse,
And drive thi peple agayn to stedfastnesse.

According to Shirley the ballade was sent by Chaucer "to his souerain lorde kynge Rycharde the secounde, thane being in his Castell of Windesore." Professor Skeat and Dr. Koch assign it a date "between 1393 and 1399," but we cannot believe that Chaucer was remonstrating with Richard on his own misconduct. A more likely date is May 1389, when the King declared that he was old enough to govern for himself, and his rule was welcomed as a relief to that of the Merciless Parliament of 1388. The previous persecution of the royal Ministers and the grant of £20,000 to the Lords Appellant seem clearly alluded to in the lines—

Pitee exiled, no wight is merciable
Thorow covetyse is blent descrescioun, etc.,

and it is probable that we may connect this address to the King with the fresh period of prosperity which began for Chaucer two months later. *Truth* and *Gentilesse* were probably written a little earlier, *i.e.* while Chaucer was still out of work.

§ 80. **Treatise on the Astrolabe—Last Poems.**—The loss of his Clerkships in 1391 must have been a great blow to Chaucer, and it is not unlikely that it checked the stream of poetry which had been flowing from him so ceaselessly during the last twelve years. Had his interest in the *Canterbury Tales* still been keen he would hardly have turned aside to compose the prose TREATISE ON THE ASTROLABE, which was probably his first work after his loss of office. The astrolabe is a disc with complicated figures on each side, useful for astrological calculations, for reckoning the height of the sun, noting the positions of stars, etc. Chaucer's treatise is mainly founded on the *Compositio et Operatio Astrolabie* of Messahala,

an Arabian astronomer of the eighth century. It is very useful in explaining the astronomical allusions in his own poems, but its literary interest is almost confined to the charming introduction addressed to "litell Lowys my sone," for whom this treatise, prettily called "Bred and mylk for childeren" in some MSS., was compiled. The poet's vindication of his use of English, and his order to his son to pray "God save the kyng, that is lord of this langage, and alle that him feyth bereth and obeieth, euerech in his degree, the more and the lasse," are especially noteworthy.

About 1393-94 we find Chaucer at work at short poems—poems quite worthy of him, but now written with difficulty instead of ease.

> Ne thynke I never of slepe to wake my muse
> That rusteth in my shethe stille in pees,

he writes to Scogan, and in his translation from Granson complains—

> For old, that in my spirit dulleth me,
> Hath of endyting al the soteltee
> Wel nyghe bereft out of my remembraunce.

In defiance of the laws of love, Chaucer's friend, Henry Scogan, had confessed that "for his lady saw not his distress, therefore he gave her up at Michaelmess"—flat rebellion which caused all the country to be drenched with the tears of Venus, and for which he is here upbraided. But the sportive poem ends with a serious request that Scogan, who had influence at Windsor, would use it to help the poor Commissioner of the Greenwich roads (see §§ 18 and 38, 2), and the request seems to have borne fruit in the pension granted the next year. The poem is in seven seven-line stanzas, the envoy containing Chaucer's call upon his friend's kindness. Probably

about the same time as this (see § 38, 2) Chaucer translated the three ballades of Sir Otes de Granson, to which the copyist Shirley gave the title THE COMPLEYNT OF VENUS, because both the originals and the translations were probably written to please Isabella of York, whom Shirley identified with the Venus of the *Compleynt of Mars* (§ 49). The French originals have only recently been found, and show that Chaucer's version is fairly literal in the first two ballades, but more free in the third. The envoy of ten lines (the three ballades are written in eight-line stanzas), with its complaint of old age and the scarcity of rhymes in English, is the best part of the poem, and this is Chaucer's own.

Some three years later, as is shown by the allusion to the prisoners in Friesland (§ 38, 2), Chaucer wrote his ENVOY TO BUKTON "touching mariage." This is a ballade in eight-line stanzas, and is full of bitter humour (or humorous bitterness, it is hard to say which) on the dotards who take on them the yoke of marriage when they might keep a free neck. Here also we may mention the two PROVERBS of four lines which have been attributed to Chaucer. If they are his, they show that the literary resurrectionist was abroad even in the fourteenth century, preserving trifles which their author would willingly have let die. Last of all we have that humorously pitiful COMPLEYNT TO HIS EMPTY PURS, a ballade of seven-line stanzas, with a five-line envoy, in which, after bidding his purse "Beth hevy ageyn, or elles mote I dye," the poet made his prayer to the "conquerour of Brutes Albioun," gaining thereby the additional pension which shielded him from penury during the last few months of his life. None of these poems enhance Chaucer's reputation, but even these last drainings from his cup are all good wine.

§ 81. **Chaucer's Rank as a Poet.**—Now that we have examined piece by piece the whole of Chaucer's poetry we must briefly consider the position which he occupies in English literature. General estimation rightly regards Shakspere as our greatest poet, and places Milton on a pinnacle of lonely grandeur which makes comparison with him unprofitable. Next to Shakspere, but far below him, we rank Chaucer. Far below him—because while Shakspere had sounded life to its utmost depths, and knew all its possibilities, Chaucer's knowledge of it was only that of an acute man of the world. Next to him—because Chaucer's shallower knowledge of life is yet perfect of its kind, and is accompanied by an absolute mastery of his art, which (Milton being always excepted) has never been equalled save, perhaps, in our own day by Lord Tennyson.

(i.) So far as his insight extended, Chaucer viewed life from the same standpoint as Shakspere. Their politics were the same. Both honoured a true man in whatever rank they found Him, both detested the "many-headed multitude," the "stormy peple, unsad and ever untrewe," and had no fond'ness for the Jacks, whether Jack Straw or Jack Cade, who put substantial well-to-do people in fear for their lives and property. As to their religion, it is curious to note that while Shakspere lived in Protestant times, and is plausibly believed to have been a Roman Catholic, Chaucer, who lived in Catholic times, has often been claimed as a Protestant. The abuses of his time caused the earlier poet to satirise the failings and sins of the hangers-on of the Church, while Shakspere's conservatism is mostly enlisted on the side of old observance. But in each case we are sure that there is real religious feeling in the background, —a refuge to Chaucer from the fleetingness of

earthly pleasures, to Shakspere from the impenetrable mysteries of existence. The temper of both men is sunny and tolerant, though we feel that the serenity of Shakspere's later plays rests on a far deeper foundation than Chaucer's cheery comradeship. But it is in what they show us, that Chaucer's inferiority is most manifest. He touches neither the height of passion nor the depth of sorrow. The love of Troilus as compared with the love of Romeo is as moonlight to sunlight. Tragedy is to Chaucer only the falling from high estate; his pathos, true and most touching so far as it goes, is hardly exercised save on a single theme—the anguish of a father or mother when they see their children about to die and cannot help them.

(ii.) Thus, if we judge Chaucer only by his knowledge of the deeper side of life, a dozen English poets may claim to approach nearer to Shakspere. But a poet must be judged firstly and mainly by his art; and as an artist, a master of his craft, Chaucer has no superior, not Shakspere himself. The wonderful music in which a great thought finds expression in inevitable words came to him but seldom; but for sustained beauty, for continuous charm, his verse has never been surpassed. Alone among English poets he possesses the art of narration in its perfection. Save in one or two early poems he is never for a moment dull, and he never cloys his readers with excess of sweetness. We feel that he is the most direct of story-tellers, and yet his narrative is never bald or thin; he has always ready at hand a touch of philosophy, a stroke of humour, or a vivid description, with which to keep up our interest and attention. The humour has never been surpassed for quaintness and subtlety. When can we be sure that we have exhausted it, or that beneath

some seemingly simple phrase there is not waiting us a quiet jest? The vivid colour of his descriptions illumine Chaucer's pages with the brightness of a mediæval manuscript. But of this most human, most lovable of English poets, it is idle, indeed, to try to summarise the just meed of praise.

APPENDIX

CHAUCER'S METRE AND VERSIFICATION—SPURIOUS AND DOUBTFUL WORKS

§ 82. **Chaucer's Metres.**—With the exception of the metrical experiments in *Anelida and Arcyte*, and the parody of the romance-metre in *Sir Thopas*, all Chaucer's poems are built up on eight (or nine) syllabled lines with four beats, or ten (or eleven) syllabled lines with five beats. The octosyllabic couplet he found in common use both in France and England, and employed it for his *Dethe of Blaunche* and *Hous of Fame*. The decasyllabic line appears in no less than twelve different arrangements—(1) the heroic couplet, used in the *Legende of Good Women* and most of the *Canterbury Tales*; (2) the five-line envoy to the *Compleynt to his Purs*, rhyming *ababa*; (3) the six six-line stanzas, all rhyming alike, *ababcb*, of the envoy to the *Clerkes Tale*; (4) his favourite seven-line stanza, called Rhyme-Royal from its subsequent use by James I. of Scotland, rhyming *ababbcc*, used in the *Pite*, *Parlement of Foules*, *Troilus*, four *Canterbury Tales*, etc.; (5) the eight-line stanza, rhyming *ababbcbc* of the *A B C*, *Monkes Tale*, *Former Age*, *Fortune*, and *Envoy to Bukton*; (6) a variety of this, imitated from Granson, in the *Compleynt of Venus*, rhyming *abab*, *bccb*; (7) a nine-line stanza, rhyming *aab*, *aab*, *bcc*, in the *Compleynt of Mars*; also (8) a variety of this with only two rhymes, *aab*, *aab*, *bab*, in part of *Anelida*; (9) a ten-line stanza, rhyming *aab*, *aab*, *cddc*, in the *Compleynt to his Lady*; also (10) a variety of this with only two rhymes, *aab*, *aab*, *baab*,

in the envoy of the *Complevnt of Venus*; (11) the roundel, rhyming *abb, ab*, ab, *baa*, abb (the roman letters mark the repeated lines), in the *Parlement of Foules* (cf. also the triple roundels of the *Merciles Beaute*, § 85); and (12) the terza rima of part of the *Complevnt to his Lady*. This last metre Chaucer imitated from Dante. To his decasyllabic stanza-metres parallels abound in contemporary French verse written under the influence of Machault; and in Machault also Professor Skeat has discovered an example of the heroic couplet, though for its elevation to the front rank among metres the English poet may claim exclusive credit. Moreover, Chaucer's handling of the different stanza-forms is distinctively his own, and his harmonies are more akin to those of the great Italian poets than to the meaner music of his French teachers.

It must be noted that whereas we have spoken of Chaucer's lines as octosyllabic and decasyllabic, most of them possess an additional unaccented syllable at the end, which gives a double (or feminine) rhyme instead of a single (or masculine) one. If we take the first stanza of the Prologue to the *Man of Lawes Tale* as an example—

> O hateful harm! condicion of poverté
> With thirst, with coold, with hunger so confoundid!
> To asken help, thee shameth in thyn herte.
> If thou noon aske, so soore artou y-woundid
> That verray nede unwrappeth al thy wounde hid;
> Maugre thyn heed, thou moste for indigence
> Or stele, or begge, or borwe thy dispence—

the extra syllables at the end of the second, fourth, and fifth lines cannot be mistaken, but they are equally present in the others, and should be lightly sounded in reading aloud.

§ 83. **Variety and Smoothness of his Verse.**—Like every other great poet, Chaucer was careful to vary his verse by shifting the position of the pause or pauses, and with the pause to help him, occasionally introduced an extra unaccented syllable in the middle of a line (*e.g. Blaunche*, l. 101, "So whán this lády koude heére

no wórd"). He also occasionally made a single long syllable supply the place of a long and a short, or a short and a long, and sometimes does this with very fine effect, as in *Blaunche*, ll. 126-128 :—

> And she, forwepéd and forwakéd
> Was weríȳ ; and thus the deed slepe
> Fil/on her/or she/took kepe :

Or in *Pite*, l. 16 :—

> Adoun I fel, when that I saugh the herse,
> Deed/as stone,/whyl that/the swogh/me laste.

Or in such lines in the *Prologue* as—

> A/bismot/red with his habergeon.—l. 76.
> G.n/glen in a whistlynge wynd als cleere.—l. 170.
> "Pérs/is th' erccdeknes helle," quod he.—l. 658.

Unfortunately he now and again makes some weak word, like *in* or *that*, serve as a monosyllabic first foot (*e.g. Prologue*, l. 391, "In a gowne of faldyng to the knee"), and then the temptation to emend is very great, though it should be resisted. But as a general rule Chaucer's verse is perfectly regular and perfectly smooth. The old complaints of its roughness were founded partly on the habit of his early editors of omitting from every second or third line some such little word as *that*, *to*, *the*, *for*, *in*, and the like ; partly on the general carelessness and ignorance as to pronunciation of the *e* final, which plays so large a part in his verse. This *e* final is to be sounded when it represents the old vowel termination of a noun in Anglo-Saxon, even sometimes when the vowel termination properly belonged only to the oblique cases of the old inflection. In nouns of French origin it is mostly sounded, but not always. It is to be sounded when it represents the dative case of monosyllabic nouns, or the definite form or the plural of monosyllabic adjectives, or the subjunctive or infinitive of verbs, or (in the case of strong verbs) the past participle ; also as an adverbial termination. On the other hand it is usually elided before a vowel, and before some of the commonest words beginning with *h*, and is specially liable to be silent after *r*. Complete rules on this sub-

ject will be found in *Chaucer's Sprache und Verskunst*, by Professor Bernhard Ten Brink, and in many less elaborate works.

§ 84. **Chaucer's nicety as to Rhymes.**—Chaucer's fine sense of harmony is peculiarly evident in the nicety of his rhymes. In *Troilus* ii. 884-6-7, he has made *syke* rhyme with *endite* and *white*, and this is the only assonance in place of a full rhyme for which he is responsible in all his works. Again, however lightly the final *e* may have been pronounced at the end of a line, this light sound was enough to make him rigorously avoid rhyming any word to which it belonged with one to which it did not belong. Thus, there is only one doubtful instance in all his works in which he rhymes a word properly ending in *-i* or *-y* with one properly ending in *-ie* or *-ye*.[1] He never makes an adverb like *sykefully*, *tenderly*, *trewely*, etc. rhyme with a substantive of French origin like *chivalrye*, *curteisye*, *glotonye*, or with infinitives like *crye*, *espye*, *gye*. The same carefulness is shown in the avoidance of all other rhymes which would link together words which, for any of the reasons given in the previous section, can claim an *e* final, with those to which it does not properly belong. Rhymes such as *dighte* (inf.) with *delit* (subst.), as *al* (adv.) with *falle* (inf.), as *solas* with *grace*, were impossible to Chaucer. Special cases of this objection to false *e* rhymes are his refusal to rhyme (i.) an infinitive with the singular of a strong preterite indicative; (ii.) an infinitive with a weak perfect participle; and (iii.) a strong preterite with a weak one. He objects also to rhyming a weak perfect participle (except it be the plural of a monosyllabic one) with a weak preterite; but from this objection he departs in fourteen cases in his 35,000 lines, so that it cannot be elevated into a rigid rule.

To the examples of Chaucer's nicety of rhyming

[1] In *Squire's Tale*, l. 503, *sly* rhymes with *ly*; in *House of Fame* (Bk. iii. l. 510), *slyre* rhymes with *lyre* (adv. of *ly*); but there is a slight difference of meaning sufficient to make *sly* and *slyre* different words.

already given, we must add a delicate class of instances first worked out by Professor Ten Brink in his *Chaucer's Sprache und Versknnst*, and recently examined by Professor Skeat with special reference to the rhymes in *Troilus and Cressida*. These authorities on English phonetics show us that Chaucer avoids rhyming words in which we know by etymology that the *e* was open, with words in which it was close, *i.e.* he will not rhyme *teche* (O.E. *tǽcan*) with *seche* (O.E. *sécan*), or *steep* (O.E. *stǽp*) with *leep* (O.E. *léop*).[1] As Professor Skeat puts it: "Chaucer knew nothing of etymology, but he knew how words were pronounced by his contemporaries"; and like all fine poets he clung to slight differences of pronunciation which in his time were already vanishing, and which other poets wholly or partly disregarded.

§ 85. **Application of the Rhyme Test to Poems ascribed to Chaucer.**—A poet who throughout the 35,000 lines of his undoubted work has shown the most delicate apprehension of even slight differences in sound cannot be lightly credited with poems in which these differences are ignored. Hence Chaucer's practice in regard to rhyme, as sketched in the preceding section, affords a ready test with which to try the authenticity of the numerous works which have been assigned to him. The history of his text can be very briefly stated. Of the twenty-five works shown to be Chaucer's in the Table on p. 40, no less than nineteen (together with the *Romaunt of the Rose*) were printed in Thynne's edition of 1532: the *Proverbs*, *Complaynt to his Lady*, and *Adam Scrivener* were added by Stow in 1561; the *A B C* by Speght in 1602; the *Former Age* (discovered by Henry Bradshaw) by Dr. Morris in 1875; the *Rosemounde* by Professor Skeat in 1891. Over against these twenty-five undoubted poems we have no

[1] Professor Skeat tries to account for a number of apparent exceptions to this rule chiefly by the theory that the divergence of the Southern and Midland dialects gave a choice of pronunciations, as also did the different forms of the words in Anglo-Saxon and Old Mercian.

less than fifty others, mostly short, but containing altogether some 17,000 lines, which the complaisance of various editors has from time to time stamped with Chaucer's name. These fifty poems fall into two divisions—(*a*) the forty-three which were added by Thynne, Stow, Speght, and Urry; and (*b*) the little handful of seven which have been assigned to Chaucer without certain evidence in modern times.

Lists of the forty-three works uncritically assigned to Chaucer in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries will be found in Professor Skeat's Introduction to his edition of the *Minor Poems* (1888), and in Professor Lounsbury's *Studies in Chaucer*, vol. i. (1891); here it is unnecessary to enumerate them. Long before increased grammatical knowledge had made the rhyme tests possible, the ascription of most of these poems to Chaucer was felt to be absurd. Some of them are avowed continuations or imitations of his genuine works; of others, the real authors—Lydgate, Hoccleve, and Robert Henryson—were easily discovered: others again were palpably later, or not in his style. Only five of these poems survived the analysis of Thomas Tyrwhitt—the first editor who brought a critical judgment to bear upon Chaucer, though unfortunately his work only extended to the *Canterbury Tales*, which he published in 1775-78. These five poems are the *Complaint of the Black Knight*, which we now know, on Shirley's authority, to be by Lydgate; the *Cuckoo and the Nightingale*, a pretty poem in stanzas rhyming *aabba*, which begins with two lines quoted from the *Knightes Tale*, and generally appears to be the work of an imitator; and the *Court of Love*, *Chaucer's Dream*, and the *Flower and the Leaf* (the last avowedly the work of a woman), all of them in language later (in the case of the *Court of Love* much later) than that of Chaucer, and all transgressing his rules as to rhyme. It should be noted that the authenticity of one poem, first printed in 1561, the *Ballade against Women Unconstant*, has lately been reasserted by Professor Skeat, on the triple ground that it is (i.)

a good poem; (ii.) perfect in its rhymes; (iii.) found in conjunction with poems undoubtedly by Chaucer in two manuscripts. That the other forty-two poems (with the barely possible exception of the *Cuckoo and the Nightingale*) are not by Chaucer, has now passed from the region of controversy into that of fact.

Of the seven poems which have been doubtfully assigned to Chaucer in recent times, the *Leaultee Vault Richesse* (eight lines), printed by Dr. Morris (1866), and the two *Proverbes*, each of seven lines, printed in Bell's Chaucer (1856), offend against the rhyme tests, while the first of the *Proverbes*, beginning "The world so wide, the air so remuable," is attributed by Shirley to another author, a certain "Halsam Squier." The verses beginning "Moder of God and Virgin undefouled," ascribed to Chaucer in Leyden's *Complaint of Scotland* (1801), were for some time accepted by the Chaucer Society, and printed among Chaucer's works. They have since, however, been found in a manuscript of Hoccleve's poems, and are now generally assigned to him. Two other poems, an *Amorous Complaint*, and a *Ballade of Complaynt*, were printed in an appendix to Professor Skeat's *Minor Poems* (1888) from transcripts by Shirley, who, however, does not claim them as Chaucer's—in itself strong evidence against their being his. In the body of the same edition Professor Skeat also printed the charming triple roundel, *Merciles Beaute*, claimed for Chaucer by Bishop Percy in 1765, on the ground of its following some of his undoubted poems in Pepys' MS. 2006. This satisfies every rhyme test, and is worthy of any poet, but its beauty will not be diminished if its authorship is here regarded as doubtful. The observance of the rhyme tests would count for much in a poem of any length, but in short poems they can only be used as a negative test, and do not justify us in haply depriving some unknown poet of his one happy effort in order to add it to Chaucer's rich storehouse. These last three poems, however, *may* be by Chaucer, as also may a little poem of eight lines, entitled *Prosperitee*, printed by

Dr. Morris in 1866. But the *Merciles Beaute* is the only very tempting one of the four, and it is not worth while even for this to disturb the strength of the Chaucer canon, which at present rests exclusively on the authority of the poet himself, or of manuscripts written shortly after his death.

§ 86. **The Romaunt of the Rose.**—This satisfactory condition of the Chaucer canon is only disturbed by one vexed question, the propriety of ascribing to Chaucer the whole or any part of the existing translation of the *Roman de la Rose*. We know from himself that Chaucer did translate this work, but as it was immensely popular, this by no means proves that the extant translation, first ascribed to him in 1532, was the one he made. The evidence, indeed, until recently was all the other way. Judged as a whole, the extant translation appears distinctly un-Chaucerian. It contains a considerable admixture of northern forms in positions where they are essential to the rhyme, and therefore cannot be due to the copyist. It contains a small percentage of assonances in place of true rhymes. It also violates repeatedly the rhyme tests by rhyming *-y* with *-ye*, and words or forms to which the *e* final is essential, with other words or forms which have no claim to it. Either then we must believe that, at one period of his life, Chaucer used northern forms, assonances, and rhymes, which in all his other poems he rejects, or we must give up the Chaucerian authorship of the *Romaunt* as a whole. An explanation of the northern forms has been lately found in Chaucer's probable winter residences in Yorkshire while in the service of the Countess of Ulster, but this suggestion only accounts for Chaucer's knowledge of northern English, not for his use of northern forms in a single poem out of all his works. A gallant attempt to counterbalance the evidence of the rhymes, by producing a number of small phrases or catchwords which were used in about the same proportion in the *Romaunt* as by Chaucer, has also failed, for the same phrases have been found abundantly in other works. Mean-

while, however, it has been noted that the first 1705 lines of the *Romaunt*, though not absolutely free from bad rhymes, are strikingly more correct in this respect than the rest of the translation. It has been proposed, therefore, to assign these first 1705 lines to Chaucer, and the rest of the *Romaunt* to another hand, or rather to two other hands, B being made responsible for ll. 1706-5810, and C for ll. 5811 to end. The difficulties in the way of accepting this theory are (i.) that Chaucer distinctly says his translation was a "heresy against Love's law," a phrase more applicable to the later portion by Jean de Meung than to ll. 1-1705, *i.e.* we must suppose that he translated beyond this point, but that his translation is lost; (ii.) that judged by merely literary tests there is no sufficient break at l. 1705 to allow us to believe that we have here two distinct translations pieced together by a scribe. We are asked, therefore, to believe that the rest of Chaucer's version was lost within a few years of its being made, and its place supplied by a skilful continuator, who caught up the tone of Chaucer's translation, though he could not free himself from his own dialect and false rhymes. A theory which would make Chaucer the author of the whole translation in his youth, and its reviser up to l. 1705, when his language and versification were more educated, does not seem exposed to more difficulties than that of his authorship of ll. 1-1705 only. Probably the till recently accepted theory that he wrote none of it is best of all. We content ourselves, however, with having stated the facts as given above. It must be distinctly remembered that, at present, all that can be said for ll. 1-1705 is that they may be, not that they are, by Chaucer.

THE END

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